Guitar MAGAZINE

NOV 2021
ISSUE 398
£6.25

PLAYER PLUS

AFFORDABLE NEW FENDERS WITH PRO SPECS AND FINISHES THAT'LL GET YOU NOTICED

TOM DELONGE
ANGELS & AIRWAVES AND UFOs

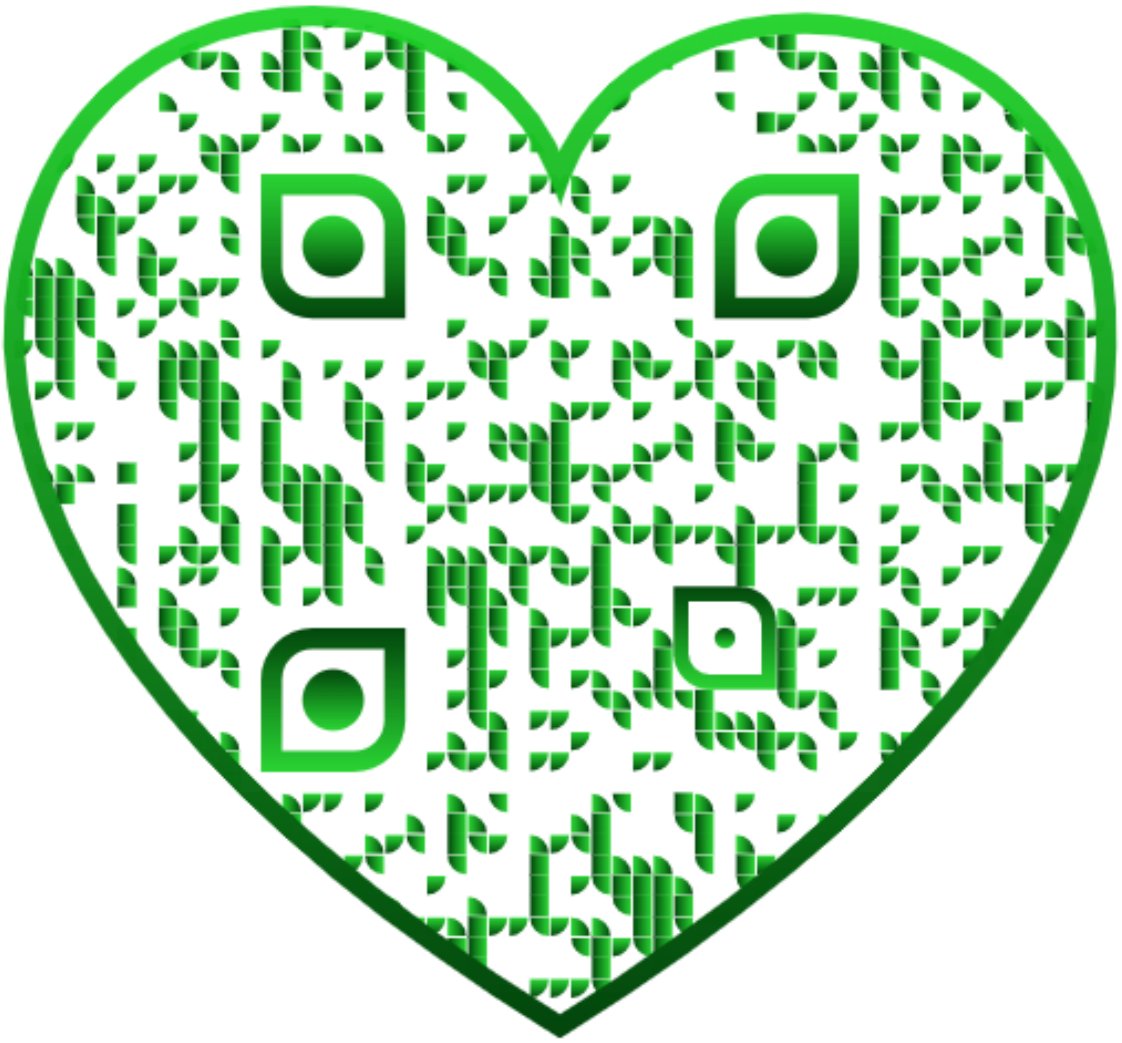
+

EPIPHONE'S SLASH COLLECTION ON TEST

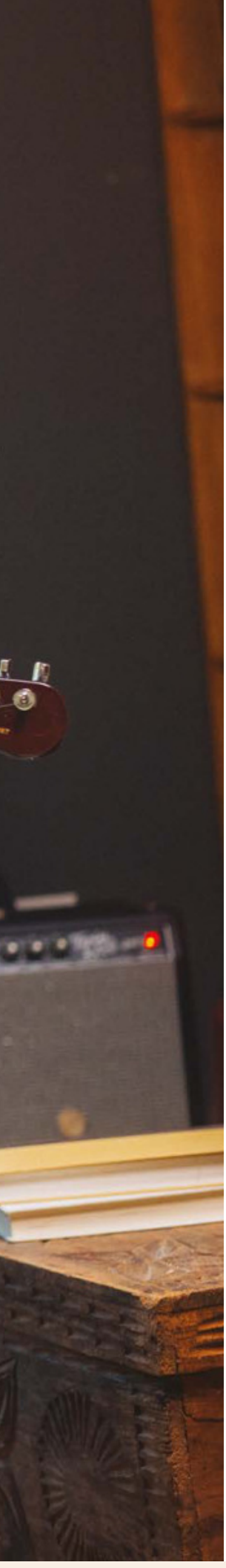
THE RISE AND FALL OF GADGET GUITARS

DENNIS FANO'S BOUTIQUE DREAM MACHINES

HOW TO CONVERT YOUR GUITAR INTO A BARITONE



@harmonyguitars



An Icon Reimagined

Expand your tonal palette with the infinitely playable **Harmony Comet.**

Features:

- Made in USA
- Semi-hollow construction
- Carved genuine mahogany top and back
- Bone nut
- Nitrocellulose lacquer finish
- Custom goldfoil humbucker
- Locking tuners
- Comes with free MONO® Vertigo Electric Guitar Case

Available in Midnight Blue, Trans Red, and Sunburst

Harmony
SINCE 1892

www.harmony.co

20

92

72

104

72
80

34

96

ISSUE 398

CONTENTS

007 EDITOR'S LETTER
008 CONTRIBUTORS
010 FRETBUZZ
012 SUBSCRIBE
014 ONES TO WATCH: SWIM SCHOOL
016 ALBUM SPOTLIGHT: DON BROCO
017 THE PLAYLIST
018 WIN! GONE FISHING EFFECTS BOOOOOM/BLAST
020 THE GUITAR INTERVIEW: TOM DELONGE
028 INTERVIEW: JOANNE SHAW TAYLOR
034 INTERVIEW: PUBLIC SERVICE BROADCASTING
044 GO GO GADGET GUITAR
052 THE COLLECTION: MARC RANSLEY, MOJO PICKUPS
066 COLUMN: JOSH SCOTT
072 REVIEW: FENDER PLAYER PLUS STRATOCASTER, STRATOCASTER HSS & NASHVILLE TELECASTER
080 REVIEW: EPIPHONE SLASH J-45 & VICTORIA LES PAUL STANDARD GOLDTOP
086 REVIEW: KRAMER CUSTOM GRAPHICS SERIES BARETTA FERAL CAT & THE 84 THE ILLUSIONIST
092 REVIEW: JACKSON PRO SERIES SIGNATURE MISHA MANSOOR JUGGERNAUT ET6
096 REVIEW: CÓRDOBA GUITARS FUSION 5
100 REVIEW: J ROCKETT AUDIO DESIGNS CLOCKWORK ECHO
104 REVIEW: RIFT AMPLIFICATIONS EL34
106 REVIEW: MYTHOS ORACLE ANALOG ECHO
110 INDUSTRY INSIDER: VERSO INSTRUMENTS
112 SHOP TALK: NOVO GUITARS
119 DIY: BARITONE STRAT CONVERSION
124 AMPLIFIER FAQ
126 FIVE MINUTES TO... CHUCK BERRY
128 CHORD CLINIC
130 TALKBOX: STEVE HOWE

EASTMAN

INTRODUCING

ROMEO LA

Feel wanted.

eastmanguitars.com

Guitar MAGAZINE

BandLab UK Limited
Unit 7, Riverside Court,
Lower Bristol Road,
Bath BA2 3DZ

EDITORIAL

CHIEF EDITOR Chris Vinnicombe
MANAGING EDITOR Josh Gardner
ART EDITOR Philip Millard
PRODUCTION EDITOR Sean McGeady
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Sam Roberts
INSTRUMENT PHOTOGRAPHY Eleanor Jane
CONTRIBUTORS Huw Baines, Darran Charles, Chris Fantana, Rod Fogg, Leigh Fuge, Dave Hunter, Ed Oleszko, Huw Price, Richard Purvis, Matthew Pywell, Rachel Roberts, Josh Scott, Michael Watts
HAVE A STORY? Email us at editors@guitar.com

SALES

ASSOCIATE MANAGER, COMMERCIAL AND PARTNERSHIPS Joe Supple
joe.supple@guitar.com

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

PUBLISHING PRODUCTION MANAGER Craig Broadbridge
PRINT William Gibbons & Sons Ltd
DISTRIBUTED BY Marketforce (UK) Ltd
5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Meng Ru Kuok
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Ivan Chen
UK COUNTRY DIRECTOR & HEAD OF STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS (EMEA) Holly Bishop
AVP, WEB TECHNOLOGIES Laurent Le Graverend
AVP, GROUP & BRAND STRATEGY Krystle Hall
ART DIRECTOR Simon Freeborough
MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY Iliyas Ong
STAFF WRITERS Cillian Breathnach, Daniel Seah
ASSOCIATE, CONTENT PRODUCTION Billy Chua

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

guitar.com/subscribe
Tel +44 (0) 1371 851 882
Calls cost 7p per minute plus your phone company's access charge

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

All content copyright BandLab UK Limited 2021, all rights reserved. While we make every effort to ensure that the factual content of *Guitar Magazine* is correct, we cannot take any responsibility nor be held accountable for any factual errors printed. Please make every effort to check quoted prices and product specifications with manufacturers prior to purchase. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or resold without the prior consent of BandLab UK Limited. *Guitar Magazine* recognises all copyrights contained within this issue. Where possible, we acknowledge the copyright.

EDITOR'S LETTER

PLAYER POWER

Welcome to the November 2021 issue of *Guitar Magazine*. I'm sure you've already noticed this month's cover guitar: a shiny new Fender Player Plus Stratocaster in Tequila Sunrise. An office poll suggests that its striking gradient finish divides the team neatly down the middle, with an equal split of lovers and haters. We wouldn't have it any other way – there are already more than enough guitars with conservative finishes to go around, and it's great to see Fender ruffle a few feathers with some daring new colourways. How do the new Player Plus models stack up when it comes to playability and tone? Turn to p72 to find out.

On a more sombre note, I was saddened to hear of the recent death of Roger Newell at the age of 73. A former colleague of several members of the *Guitar Magazine* team, Roger was best known as the bassist in Rick Wakeman's English Rock Ensemble in the 1970s. Wielding the world's first-ever triple-neck bass, Roger's work with Wakeman included the multi-million selling albums *Journey To The Centre Of The Earth* and *The Myths And Legends Of King Arthur And The Knights Of The Round Table*. Prior to that, Roger was a member of cult psychedelic pop group Rainbow Ffolly and since 1988, he featured in Marty Wilde's band The Wildcats. Roger also served as deputy editor of *Bassist* magazine in the 1990s, and was a regular contributor to *Guitarist* magazine.

In his long career, Roger graced some of the world's most prestigious stages, all while rocking a bass rig loud enough to earn him the nickname 'World War Three'. He was also a Shadows aficionado par excellence, an incredibly funny man and an absolute one-off, whose loss will be felt throughout the UK guitar industry and beyond. Our deepest sympathies go out to his family, friends and former bandmates.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

DON'T MISS OUT!

Visit us online for the latest on gear, artists, technique and the guitar industry
Guitar.com | facebook.com/guitar | youtube.com/theguitarmagazine
instagram.com/guitar | twitter.com/guitar

Guitar
CONTRIBUTORS

To celebrate the eye-popping new finishes on Fender's Player Plus Series, including the Tequila Sunrise Strat that graces this month's cover, we asked some of our contributors to nominate their all-time favourite non-traditional guitar finishes

JOSH GARDNER
NEBULOUS CONCEPT

It's NAMM 2020 and Josh is sat in the PRS booth chatting to Brad Whitford, when the Aerosmith man points to a guitar on the wall and asks, "Isn't that the coolest thing?" The guitar in question is a Silver Sky in its new Nebula finish, and it's only when you're in the room with one of these polychromatic 'flip-flop' guitars that you appreciate what a remarkable thing it is. Not one colour, but several all at once, as the light catches its lines and curves, morphing before your eyes as you move. Yeah, Brad: it *is* the coolest thing.

DAVE HUNTER
SPARKLING PROSE

US writer Dave has authored upwards of 18 books, including the forthcoming *Fender 75 Years*, an official history of the brand. He profiles Novo Guitars for this issue. "As rapid as Dennis Fano's rise to prominence may seem," he says, "it was clear from the start of our conversation that he had a unique vision from the first guitar he built." Flip to p110 to read more. Dave's star guitar finish? "The Koll Super Glide Almighty. It contrasts a silver sparkle top with a red back implanted with metallic flakes that radiate a rainbow of colours."

RICHARD PURVIS
LIGHTBULB MOMENT

As well as reviewing some exciting effects pedals for us, on p44 of this issue Richard chronicles the history of gadget guitars, from flagrant failures of the 1960s to Manson's modern apparatus. "The feature involved fascinating research into gear that I have absolutely no desire to own, which made a nice change," he says. One such instrument, however – and its unusual finish – struck a chord. "The Rickenbacker 331 got me twitching a bit, with its translucent top and flashing coloured bulbs. Wonderfully ridiculous."

HUW PRICE
PEEL & STICK

As a longtime guitar tech, in his time, Huw has seen countless finishes. Many, in fact, have passed through his freezer en route to organic-looking ageing. "I like greened-up Ice Blue Metallic and I'm very partial to Gretsch Anniversary guitars in two-tone green," he says. As far as truly unusual finishes go, his favourite is a little more out-there: the 'Peeler' Telecaster-type built by Idaho's Bolin Guitars for Billy Gibbons. Turn to p118 and Huw'll teach you how to turn your Stratocaster into a baritone, no fancy finish required.

RACHEL ROBERTS
FLOWER POWER

Recent graduate Rachel has taken to music journalism as well as she took to her first Martin Smith acoustic. Go to p28 to read the self-taught guitarist's interview with a British blues player done good in the US: Joanne Shaw Taylor. "You could tell she's thankful for her success," says Rachel. As far as non-traditional finishes go, Rachel's pick is coming up roses… and daisies… and daffodils… "I love paisley and floral patterns, particularly on a Tele," she says. "The Blue Flower 1969 Fender Telecaster is a dream guitar."

CAT WOODS
SHELLING OUT

Melbourne-based Cat has written about music for *The Australian*, *Sydney Morning Herald* and *The Guardian*. As a teenager in the 90s, her formative love of guitar was the result of heavy exposure to the likes of Smashing Pumpkins, PJ Harvey and Pearl Jam. Go to *Guitar.com* to read Cat's recent interview with Aussie punk upstarts Amyl & The Sniffers. "I love a Shell Pink finish," she says. "The 1956 shade lies somewhere between beige and pink. It's almost like flesh. Since a guitar is like an extra limb, isn't that kind of appropriate?"

PLAYER PLUS

A NEW KIND OF PLAYER

NOVA TWINS PLAYS THE STRATOCASTER® HSS IN BELAIR BLUE

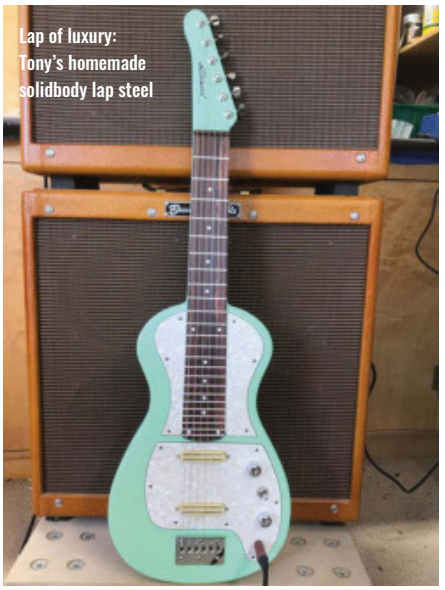
©2021 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. All Rights Reserved. FENDER (standard and in stylized form), STRATOCASTER, STRAT and the distinctive headstock shapes commonly found on the FENDER instruments are trademarks of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation and/or its affiliates, registered in the U.S. and other countries.

FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

The single life: Cameron's four-strong Esquire collection



Lap of luxury: Tony's homemade solidbody lap steel

ESQUIRE SUBSCRIPTION

Hi, *Guitar Magazine*. I really enjoyed reading Huw Price's feature on converting a Telecaster into an Esquire with the Eldred mod in the latest issue [397]. It's just a shame that I hadn't seen it before embarking on my own Esquire trilogy in four parts! It could have saved me a lot of money – but I don't regret a thing! In the words of Squeeze, Daphne (Blue), don't be ridiculous.

CAMERON MACKENZIE, VIA EMAIL

That's quite the collection you have there, Cameron. We'd ask you which one is your favourite but we get the feeling that you wouldn't want to choose between them. We certainly couldn't.

PLAYING OUT

Hi, *Guitar*. Chris asked us about our post-lockdown gigging experience in his editor's letter last month, so I thought I'd share mine. We are Peel Street, we play classic rock and, on Saturday, we played at a local village, in a field just like Glastonbury. The similarity ended there. The stage was three sheets of weyroc, with no canopy, no vehicle access, a power cable 50 yards to a nearby house and toilets in another house that was a 10-minute walk away on the other side of the field. Luckily it didn't rain until our last song.

In fairness, it was for charity and mainly for local residents, which is why there were only about 50 people there. The bassist, the clever dick who booked us that gig, is still in pain from the pins we've been sticking in an effigy of him ever since, ahem. Still, at least that's the first one down!

COLIN IBBERTSON, VIA EMAIL

Hello, guys. Chris mentioned his upcoming (and presumably now done and dusted) return to gigging in his latest editorial, so I thought I'd share my experience of getting back to playing out. We actually formed a new band (of old friends who've played together in different bands) during lockdown and had our debut gig at the end of August, including this song written especially to mark the occasion.

One advantage of the restrictions was the limited capacity of the venue meant the gig was sold out well in advance. Excellent food for the ego! As the song says, it's great to be back. I also played one of my lockdown guitar builds during the gig! I hope Chris's comeback was as much fun as ours. We had a total blast and the audience loved it.

MATT FISHER, VIA EMAIL

After so long without gigs, it's both encouraging and exciting to hear the tales of your first shows since restrictions have eased, so keep them coming in. And if you happened to play a guitar you built during lockdown like Matt did, even better!

LAP OF THE GODS

Hi, everyone. I read about you asking for lockdown guitar builds but I thought I'd share something a little bit different that I've been working on recently: a solidbody 24-inch lap steel guitar made in my garage in sunny Rochford, Essex. It turned out so well, I've actually built a few more…

TONY ROSSELL, VIA EMAIL

KRAMER
MADE TO ROCK HARD
"THE ILLUSIONIST"
THE 84 CUSTOM GRAPHICS COLLECTION
KRAMERGUITARS.COM
Kramer

Guitar MAGAZINE

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE UP TO 35%*

JUST £22.99 EVERY SIX MONTHS SAVING 35% OFF THE UK COVER PRICE

GET YOUR MONTHLY SUPPLY
OF NEW GEAR REVIEWS, IN-DEPTH FEATURES, WORKSHOPS AND TUITION

SPREAD THE COST
BY CONVENIENT DIRECT DEBIT*

FREE UK DELIVERY

NOT IN THE UK?

DON'T WORRY – WE'VE GOT SPECIAL OFFERS FOR INTERNATIONAL READERS TOO

EUROPE €39.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVE 35%
AUSTRALIA $58.99 AUD EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVE 35%
USA/CANADA $42.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVE 35%
REST OF THE WORLD £34.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS

ORDER ONLINE TODAY AT GUITAR.COM/SUBSCRIBE

ORDER NOW!

ONLINE
GUITAR.COM/SUBSCRIBE
USE CODE **GMPR2021**

PHONE
01371 851 882
USE CODE **GMPR2021**

CODE **GMPR2021**

OFFER ENDS **31 DECEMBER 2021**

*35% saving is available to UK customers paying by Direct Debit only. You will pay just £22.99 every 6 months, saving 35% off the UK cover price. All other savings are based on the local cover price for Europe, Australia and North America and are available when you pay by continuous card payment only. You will receive 12 issues of *Guitar Magazine* per year, starting with the next available issue.

Guitar
MAGAZINE
NOV 2021
ISSUE 398
£6.25
PLAYER PLUS
AFFORDABLE NEW FENDERS WITH PRO SPECS AND FINISHES THAT'LL GET YOU NOTICED
TOM DELONGE
ANGELS & AIRWAVES AND UFOs
+
EPIPHONE SLASH COLLECTION ON TEST
THE RISE AND FALL OF GADGET GUITARS
DENNIS FANO'S BOUTIQUE DREAM MACHINES
HOW TO CONVERT YOUR GUITAR INTO A BARITONE

ONES TO WATCH

SWIM SCHOOL

WORDS MATTHEW PYWELL

With new EP *Making Sense Of It All* documenting the Edinburgh act's growth from buoyant indie-pop band to atmospheric, emotional artistes, guitarists Alice Johnson and Lewis Bunting tell us more

Over the past few years, we've had more time to ourselves than ever before – time spent both reflecting on the past and considering the future. Indeed, Swim School ruminate on both on their new EP – itself put together in the midst of the pandemic – while also navigating a thick haze of personal issues revolving around mental health, toxicity and turmoil. This is a band equally adept at creating shape-shifting, palatable ambience as they are cutting through the malaise with weighty guitar noise. With that in mind, we chat to guitarists Alice Johnson and Lewis Bunting about their continuous creative process, swapping a solitary chorus pedal for a trio of distortions, and more.

Your songs confront the difficulties of opening up about mental-health issues. How important is it to normalise this?

Alice: "I think is really important. It wasn't until recently that you started seeing TV adverts about mental health. In school, you were never educated on it and to think now, how much of a big thing it is, it's kind of mental that we were never talked to about it. Music was the thing that kind of opened my eyes to what mental health was. I related to a lot of lyrics through bands I discovered. The thought towards the EP is that if music could help me then I hope that this music can help somebody else."

How would you describe your creative process?

Lewis: "We start with music first but we'll wind up by playing a cool chord or something and just jam it, then we'll see where it goes with that. One thing I'd like to try is to write a song solely from looping stuff. Then we'll record it and upload it to

© Rory Barnes

"DEEP DOWN, WE ALWAYS KNEW WE WANTED TO BE HEAVIER THAN WHEN WE FIRST RELEASED *SWAY*, WHICH IS KIND OF AN INDIE-POP SONG"

SoundCloud, go back a couple of weeks later with fresh minds. If it's got legs, then we'll take it into the studio."

What inspired you to start playing guitar?

Alice: "Ellie [Rowsell] from Wolf Alice. They were the first-ever band I had been recommended that had a female lead singer and guitarist."

Lewis: "When I was younger I was the biggest Metallica fan! James Hetfield and Kirk Hammett, I wanted to *be* them."

What are your go-to guitars?

Lewis: "I play two Fender Jazzmasters. One is very traditional, it's got vintage-spec black bobbin pickups and that early 60s sound to it. It was a Squier but I've made it a Fender. The other is an American Pro in Sonic Gray, with a maple neck – the same one that Sam Fender plays. I've also put two Wide Range humbuckers in it."

Alice: "I play an Arctic White Strat, which was the first guitar I ever bought myself. I've got a blue Mustang as well, which used to belong to Billy's [McMahon, drummer] old guitarist. The Strat holds a lot of memories for me."

Are there any pedals that have defined your sound?

Lewis: "The two big ones are the Strymon Timeline and the Big Sky. I couldn't play a show without either of them. I *love* how, on the Timeline, you can distort the repeats of the delay. I have a Hudson Broadcast as well; I was using it as a preamp for most of the year but I recently changed it to my fuzz/distortion sound because it does that so well."

Alice: "The chorus was probably the main pedal I used on my board but now I hardly use it. I swapped that out for three distortion pedals because, as a band, we are getting heavier. Deep down, we always knew we wanted to be heavier than when we first released *Sway*, which is kind of an indie-pop song. Now we're unleashing a heavier sound."

What riffs stand out to you on your new EP?

Alice: "*See Red*. It's not really complex but it's so fun to play. That's gonna be so much fun to play live because it's fast and it's loud. It had, like, three levels of distortion on it." **G**

***Making Sense Of It All* is out now**

THE PLAYLIST

W

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

DON BROCO
AMAZING THINGS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

On their fourth album proper, the genre-averse British band are again pushing their boundaries into new and interesting territory

Don Broco refuse to settle down on *Amazing Things*. Instead, they drift deftly between electro, rock, metal and hardcore, formulating a sound that's reminiscent of Deftones, Linkin Park and early Incubus. The Bedford band's previous album, 2018's *Technology*, landed in the top five of the UK charts and has since clocked up more than 100 million streams on Spotify, resulting in a sold-out show at Alexandra Palace and a headline show at Wembley Arena. Their success has only strengthened their resolve. On their fourth album, Don Broco are once again determined to mark themselves out as a distinctive creative force.

Covering such delicate topics as the pitfalls of social media, the dark side of fandom and casual racism, Broco do not shy away from challenging topics. Nor do they shirk from demanding playing techniques. Don Broco's development into one of the UK's most exciting guitar bands is in part thanks to the work of underrated guitarist Simon Delaney. Staying true to his beloved PRS Custom 24 for each of the band's recordings, he also uses a Pawn Shop Strat, even going so far as to retain demo guitar parts and re-route them through a reel-to-reel for added character. Here, he discusses his favourite parts on the new LP.

GUMSHIELD

"On every record I feel like there's one pedal you discover which becomes forever associated with that particular recording. For this record, it was the Empress Effects Heavy pedal. We used this thing across *everything*. Not just guitars; we were re-amping snares through it, basically just throwing it at anything – and it made everything sound better! The in-built noise gates on it are mean but crazy-useful, and you can drive it super-hard while still keeping control."

HOW ARE YOU DONE WITH EXISTING?

"This is a pretty synth-led track, so it left a tonne of room for me to go straight-up traditional with the lead guitar parts. I love 1980s rock leads and solos – Bryan Adams, Bon Jovi, anything where there are reverb-drenched leads is right up my street. I wanted to keep the solo pretty simple and loosely related to the vocal melody. I had a tonne of fun coming up with it. The final tone ended up being my JCM800 with a TS-808 and a POG II."

ONE TRUE PRINCE

"When we were recording *Endorphins*, I was messing around in the studio, voicing chords for that chorus in a more developed way. It sounded so good on the guitar but didn't quite work with the vocal for that song. I knew there was something in the re-voicing I had been trying, so I went home, shifted the key of the progression slightly and wrote a new song around it. That song then became *One True Prince* and, aside from the key being a semitone apart from *Endorphins*, the chorus chord progression is the same!"

EASTER SUNDAY

"In a lot of my demos, I'll be using amplifier sims for the guitars, some of which are amazing but often lack that feel of realness and warmth. If there was a really special bit of demo guitar where I couldn't match the feel of that original take, we'd run it though the reel-to-reel tape machine to give the demo guitar a bit more character and warmth. We were using a 1970s Akai, which our producer Jason had just bought, and it's all over the record. You can hear it super-clearly on the intro of *Easter Sunday*, where it's my original demo guitar running through the tape, and I'm slowing the reel with my finger at points to make it flutter. It was a great tool to breathe a bit of character into more sterile tones."

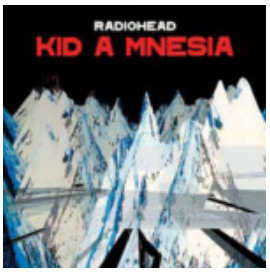
ANAHEIM

"*Anaheim* was one of the first instrumentals I'd written for the record, it was at least three years ago now. The straight, quarter-note guitar break was something I rattled off very quickly without really thinking about it. I just recorded it for the demo and then forgot about it for a couple of years. When we came around to write the song as a band, it was one of those moments where I played the demo back and thought, 'Wow this part is actually *sick*'. When we came to recording it, I used my Fender Pawn Shop Strat through a stereo set-up of a Bluesbreaker and my JCM800, with a tonne of room mics in the mix to give it a real spread feel. Easily one of my favourite guitar tones and parts on the album." G

Amazing Things is out now via SharpTone Records

PLAYLIST

Every month, the *Guitar.com* editorial team and contributors recommend the tracks that they've got on repeat right now



RADIOHEAD

If You Say The Word

Radiohead recorded *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* simultaneously during a creative explosion in 1999-2000. The dystopian, experimental nature of those albums shed a few fans who simply wanted the band to remake indie-rock anthems such as *Fake Plastic Trees* and *Creep*, but Radiohead's refusal to stand still is precisely what's kept them relevant for so many years. *If You Say The Word* is a beguiling outtake from the 1999-2000 sessions and a hint at what's to come from *Kid A Mnesia*, the forthcoming reissue that compiles *Kid A* and *Amnesiac* alongside unreleased material and B-sides. Desolate vocals, gently picked guitars, an ondes Martenot… few bands could afford to leave this on the cutting room floor.

Chris Vinnicombe

JULIEN BAKER

Favor (Jesu Remix)

I'm not sure how many people listened to Julien Baker's sublime 2021 record *Little Oblivions* and thought, 'This needs to be more sludge metal'. But Godflesh founder Justin Broadrick (AKA Jesu) did. For the new *(Remixes)* EP, he's taken the delicate *Favor* and turned into something radically different but no less interesting. Gone is the acoustic guitar, replaced with a menacingly distorted seven-string, while electronic beats give way to a foreboding kick drum and crashing cymbals, with Baker's original ethereal lead lines instead crescendoing into self-oscillating bliss. It's like the Baker/Stef Carpenter/Kevin Shields collab I never knew I needed.

Josh Gardner

KAREN BLACK

I Wish I Knew The Man I Thought You Were

I've long been a fan of Karen Black, who starred in everything from New Hollywood classics (good) to low-budget horror schlock (better). What I didn't know until recently is that the stunning actor also had designs on becoming a recording artist. Recently unearthed and released with the help of singer-songwriter Cass McCombs, *Dreaming Of You* is made up of raw, simple, spectral, character-driven songs that Black laid down during the 1970s. This track, however, was put together by Black and McCombs before the actor's death in 2013, and is the album's longest and most expansive, Black's voice by now aged into an oaken Stevie Nicks-style drawl. Wonderful story, wonderful record.

Sean McGeady

SAM FENDER

Seventeen Going Under

Proud Geordie Sam Fender is the artist I turn to when I'm craving music laced with bittersweet angst, as well as looking for inspiration when it comes to my own playing. He has a knack for writing songs that sound thrillingly nostalgic, and new single *Seventeen Going Under* gives us our first taste of his upcoming sophomore album of the same name, channelling elements of Bruce Springsteen through Fender's throaty, wavering vocals and clean, bright guitar. It seems to suggest that Fender hasn't departed from the stylistic choices that characterised his 2019 debut *Hypersonic Missiles*, but I think that's what I love so much about it. If it ain't broke don't fix it, right?

Rachel Roberts

TURNSTILE

Holiday

I wasn't a Turnstile fan before checking out new album *Glow On*. It was fine but I didn't give it much thought after my first listen. But one night, while my leftovers did the dance of rejuvenation in the microwave, an involuntary yelp escaped me: "Now it's a holiday!" Odd, I thought, because I knew full well it wasn't. Commuting by train to band practice one evening, my hips began gyrating as I struggled to hold in my breath: "ig wuh uh hohlidey!" What was happening to me? I had to check *Glow On* out again – and I did. As you might have guessed, *Holiday* has an absolutely infectious vocal hook, and it's supported by powerchord riffage that's as joyful as an actual day off.

Dan Seah

LA LUZ

The Pines

Soon returning with their self-titled fourth album, out 22 October, LA-based surf-noir band La Luz have proven once again that surf guitar has its place in modern music. Opening with a percussive McCartney-style bassline elevated by a killer riff reminiscent of Link Wray, Shana Cleveland's layered vocals offer a welcome tonic to the reverb-drenched guitar sound that permeates new single *The Pines*. Having turned to Adrian Younge for production on their forthcoming LP, the band are on course to expand their sonic palette too, having strayed into more psychedelic territory than ever before. For me, they're one of the most exciting alt-rock acts in North America right now.

Sam Roberts

COMPETITION

WIN A GONE FISHING EFFECTS SIMON NEIL BOOOOOM/BLAST WORTH £299

This small but fierce pedal from the boutique brand offers two unique voices in a typically beautiful box. Enter below for your chance to win

Biffy Clyro's Simon Neil knows a thing or two about making loud, angry noises. So when his guitar tech Richard Pratt set up his Gone Fishing Effects brand, it was only natural that the pair would collaborate on a signature pedal with the brief, according to Pratt that, "it had to be the loudest pedal we can make".

The result is the Booooom/Blast (named after Biffy song *Booooom, Blast & Ruin*), which pairs separate overdrive and fuzz circuits in the same box: Blast a transistor fuzz effect and Booooom a germanium diode overdrive. The unit lets you combine gritty, amp-like roar with fuzz that can morph from a polite 1960s tone into joyous square wave rumble with infinite sustain. Both circuits stack exceptionally well and have superb clarity.

The pedal's initial limited-edition run has already long sold out, so if you still want to experience Gone Fishing Effects' Booooom/Blast unit for yourself, you'll have to enter our competition and hope you're the lucky winner. To be in with a chance, simply head to the link below and answer the following question. Good luck!

On which Biffy Clyro album does the track *Booooom, Blast & Ruin* feature?
A) Puzzle
B) Only Revolutions
C) Ellipsis

Enter at guitar.com/competitions

Terms & Conditions

By entering this competition, you agree to the following terms and conditions:

The closing date is **23:59 GMT, 8 November 2021.** The company's decision is final. The competition is open to UK residents only. When entering Guitar Magazine competitions, you will be given the option to receive details of future promotions from BandLab UK Limited and related third parties. If you do not want to receive this information, you can opt out. This giveaway is open to over-18s only. For full terms and conditions, please go to **bnd.la/gm-ctos.**

40th
ANNIVERSARY
SD-1

30th
ANNIVERSARY
MT-2

2021 Commemorative Edition pedals. Only available during 2021.
Discover more at boss.info

BOSS

TOM DELONGE

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

WORDS — HUW BAINES — PORTRAITS — JONATHAN WIENER — LIVE — KEVIN TROUT

The former Blink-182 frontman has been called a musical genius, he's been called insane, and he's been called most things in between. As the guitarist returns with the sixth Angels & Airwaves album, we chat to the Californian about UFOs, ditching amps and pedals, the beautiful simplicity of single-pickup guitars, and how it feels to have the US Navy tell the world that you're not crazy after all…

We all come with a self-destruct button. For some, it'll remain factory sealed. Others, at some point or another, will press it. These days Tom DeLonge just does what he wants – without consulting the broken remains of a device that he's spent decades hitting.

Twenty years ago, DeLonge was the guitarist and vocalist in what some consider the first punk band to score a No 1 album in the US. In 2001, Blink-182's *Take Off Your Pants And Jacket* went platinum at a time when sophomoric pop-punk had become one of the major currencies in popular music.

Since then he's quit Blink twice, first when his post-hardcore side project Box Car Racer unintentionally created a fissure that led to their split in 2005, and then a personal departure from the band in 2015 after 2009's reunion. DeLonge launched Angels & Airwaves in the wake of that first 'indefinite hiatus', and the synth-rock group's new LP *Lifeforms* is now their sixth full-length. But DeLonge also makes movies, writes books and, almost inconceivably, has become a mouthpiece for the UFO-curious in a

manner that has led to many unkind headlines. "Blink-182's Tom DeLonge Has Officially Gone Batshit Insane." You know, that sort of stuff.

Two years ago, though, the US Navy admitted that videos of "unidentified aerial phenomena" published by the *New York Times* and the To The Stars Academy of Arts & Sciences – a company co-founded in 2017 by DeLonge, alongside a parapsychologist and a former CIA intelligence officer – were legitimate. In a recent podcast, DeLonge's former Blink bandmate Mark Hoppus, who is currently undergoing treatment for cancer, described him as "fearless".

"I attribute everything to my quest to follow my heart and soul regardless of what people understand or what they like," says DeLonge. "If I didn't have that I would be complacent. I've put myself out there so many times and I've been properly misunderstood in public for so many things that I love it because I don't care. People know that I'm unpredictable. They also know that I'm pretty clever and they also know now that, holy shit, maybe he's not fuckin' crazy. In that whole time, when people thought I was crazy or that I was some problem child – maybe I am – I was learning and doing things that were ambitious."

SIGNS OF LIFE

In this context, *Lifeforms* is an interesting beast. As much as it's another über-slick slice of Depeche Mode-meets-U2 pop-rock, in tracks such as *Euphoria* and *Restless Souls* – a dead ringer for *Untitled*-era Blink – the album also boasts a prominent seam of bratty, vibrant punk energy. In tandem with multi-instrumentalist Ilan Rubin, who shouldered a share of the final tracking and added key elements to songs that had spent three years in the workshop, DeLonge charges into hooks and slams his signature Gibson ES-333 into maximum-crunch power chords.

"WHEN PEOPLE THOUGHT I WAS CRAZY – AND MAYBE I AM – I WAS LEARNING AND DOING THINGS THAT WERE AMBITIOUS"

"When you start out as a punk band, you're playing fast," says DeLonge. "Usually, the way you'd progress your songwriting is by slowing down. Angels & Airwaves, we were in the middle. The choice on this record, at least in the beginning, was to go more raw. I wanted to go in a direction that was not as saturated, produced, and wasn't so atmospheric. But through that three-year journey, I was like, 'Shit, I really want these all to sound different'. I don't want every song to sound like *Euphoria*. I was like, 'How do we really celebrate all the things I grew up on?' Like the Cure and all the punk rock bands. What you have is a journey through all my favourite stuff. I make these

Tom DeLonge playing his signature ES-333 on stage with Angels & Airwaves

records for myself."

Lifeforms is another textural expedition that opens clear water between itself and the idea of DeLonge as a three-chord thrasher. "In my earlier years with Blink, it was, 'How do I create tones that let these songs sound different from each other?' But all I was using was a distortion pedal and every once in a while a flanger," he says. "Now, in Angels & Airwaves, there are delay pedals and synthesisers and organic oscillations from fuckin' modular synths. I craft songs by what's needed, not what I'm limited to. That's the biggest difference."

Something that hasn't changed, however, is his utilitarian approach to modding guitars. Back in his Blink days, he played a Strat that had more stickers than pickups by a rough ratio of 20:1. His ES-333 is similarly simple, with one Dirty Fingers humbucker at the bridge, and one volume knob. "I'm always using that guitar. It's so versatile," he says. "When I made it, I was very much trying to come up with a guitar that can be used in a live environment, that works for clean tones and dirty tones and everything in the middle. But in the studio, we work really fast. I lay down these songs and want to move, move, move. That guitar ends up being a huge component of that.

"When I first started playing, the Stratocaster

Angels & Airwaves (l-r): Ilan Rubin, drums; Matt Rubano, bass; Tom DeLonge, lead vocals, guitar; David Kennedy, guitar

"WHEN YOU FIND A VIBRATION THAT SPEAKS TO YOU, IT CAN CHANGE THE WAY YOU THINK. THIS IS GROUP-CONSCIOUSNESS STUFF"

just seemed like a cool-looking guitar," DeLonge adds. "I took out all the pickups, just had one pickup and one knob. I was a punk-rock kid. But then later on, I realised, 'Well, fuck, this guitar looks like a violin on me'. I'm six foot four. I went after the hollowbody. It fits me in scale and vibe. I did the same thing and took out all the knobs and switches and pickups – all this bullshit that does not matter. Just turn it up and go. I found a pickup that works really well and I haven't strayed from it since."

Just turn it up and go, however, is more of a philosophy than a reality these days. With an audible air of resignation and regret, DeLonge's days of messing around with mic placements and stacks of pedals are largely behind him.

"It's so different now because of amp and speaker modelling," he says. "We do it all in-the-box. We're able to change it all the way up to the mix. You can back off the distortion. We're re-amping a lot of guitars, then we transfer into the Axe-Fx stuff because that's where it all lives these days. Using pedals and amplifiers… it's sad but it's just not needed anymore. It just creates a headache because you can't duplicate things exactly. There's always a loss of signal when you're trying to amp it up every other night on stage. It's also super-expensive and heavy to ship around, those speaker cabinets weigh a thousand pounds each, you know? Plugging a guitar into an amplifier and turning it up? There's nothing better. But for the professionalism of music, it is just not needed."

WEST COAST SOUND

DeLonge's youth was spent causing trouble with a skateboard beneath his feet in Poway, California, about 20 miles north of San Diego. As his wheels criss-crossed the city's asphalt, he gorged on the foundational sounds of West Coast punk rock, from Descendents and All to Bad Religion, TSOL, NOFX, and the noise coming out of the East Bay.

"They went together, it was one culture," he says. "The whole scene was really full of a punk-rock ethos. At the time, skateboarding, wherever you did it, was against the law. You weren't in the Olympics. There weren't skateparks everywhere. It was a very counter-cultural, rebellious thing. There's an element of danger, there's an element of breaking the law, and there's an element of individuality. That is a big piece of who I am."

It was up the coast, in Portland, Oregon, however, that his eyes were opened to punk for the first time. While visiting a friend, DeLonge spent hours upon

hours hunkered down with nothing but a guitar and a handful of records for company. It knocked his world clean off its axis.

"I'm in seventh grade," he says. "My friend goes to school during the day. They were like, 'You can hang with him at school if you want?' I tried that for one day and it was the dumbest thing I ever did. It was so weird. So I stayed at his house until he got out. I looked at the guitar and thought, 'How does this thing work?' I spent about three days playing his guitar and three records: Dinosaur Jr, All and Stiff Little Fingers. The very first time I picked up a guitar, I didn't just try to hit notes, I tried to write something, which is the strangest thing. That's like picking up a calculator and going, 'I'm going to figure out an equation'. But my fingers wouldn't do what my brain wanted them to. It pissed me off. I had to figure it out and make my fuckin' fingers do it. Then I wrote my first song. I still remember the riff to this day."

Not long later, DeLonge's friends at the church his mother made him attend clubbed together and raised $40 for a garage sale six-string. DeLonge says he's played guitar every day of his life ever since.

SCAT MEN

Blink-182 formed in 1992, when Tom was introduced to Hoppus. Together with drummer Scott Raynor, they hit upon a blend of scatalogical hyper-melodic punk almost immediately. Their *Buddha* demo tape made waves locally and opened doors for them to climb the rungs in the wake of Green Day, The Offspring and

Rancid's commercial explosion. By 2001, Blink were one of the biggest bands on the planet.

DeLonge, Hoppus and human drum machine Travis Barker, who replaced Raynor in 1998, took the blueprint laid out on Blink's 1997 single *Dammit* and spun solid gold in the form of 1999's *Enema Of The State*. The album shifted five million copies and its sleeve, which featured porn star Janine Lindemulder, became emblematic of a pervading frattiness in pop culture. Blink and the bands that were carried along with them would become the catchy soundtrack to *American Pie* and the scores of raunchy teen comedies that followed it, creating a strange kind of multimedia synergy.

In following *Enema*, Blink turned out *Take Off Your Pants And Jacket*, an album that appears at this remove like something of a full stop on the whole thing. Produced by the late Jerry Finn, it pushed that era of pop-punk to a logical extreme, taking a surgical approach to realising songs that brimmed with snot and hurt amid all the dick jokes. Blink never created anything like it again and DeLonge thinks that few others have come close either – and for good reason.

"We weren't a mainstream pop-punk band," he says. "We were touring for seven years with bands like Guttermouth and the Vandals. We were coming from a more raw, unfiltered, unproduced scene. Those attributes are in our DNA, regardless of how big *Enema* got. People were putting us up and thinking we were a boyband. We didn't get it. We were like, 'What the fuck is going on?' A week ago we were lighting drumsticks on fire in our ass on stage and then people think we're supposed to be on MTV dancing around."

On *TOYPAJ*, DeLonge and Blink were looking towards raw, punk iconoclasm for inspiration. "On that record, I remember specifically the things that appealed to us were, 'What's NOFX doing? What's Fugazi doing? What's Propagandhi doing, or the Queers?' Just cool shit that's raw, where you can hear the guitars. You can hear the angst. You can hear the 'Fuck off, what I've been doing is cooler than what you've been doing'. You don't hear that now in pop-punk bands. They do vocal acrobatics or they fuckin' have lots of electronics that disguise everything. We were trying to be very clever with three instruments, coming from a place that was all angst and breaking the law and growing up in broken families."

FORMATIVE MOMENTS

Lifeforms is the work of a musician who still feels connected to these emotions and the mile markers they represent in his life. DeLonge can look back at Box Car Racer and appreciate the rush of standing alone on a precipice. He can understand the hurt it caused when Barker hopped aboard and Hoppus did not. He can draw a straight line from its brooding dynamics to the chug of *Euphoria*.

"I'm aware of what we did, I am aware of what that was," he says. "It was extremely important for me as an artist. Blink was getting so big and people were pigeonholing us as this pop thing. I wanted to make sure that I was creating things that are reflective of who I really am, not just who people think I am. When we released *Euphoria*, that was specifically me saying, 'Here's Box Car Racer'. This is needed at this point in my career – to revisit what I had and what we did and try to do something new off a foundation where I'm respecting what I did in the past. I was remembering those eras in my songwriting where I felt I was in touch with something that was pretty cool."

There's something in that sentiment. *Lifeforms* comes across like a synthesis of the multi-hyphenate DeLonge of 2021 and the kid who made it out of Poway on the back of his chemistry with another punk kid who happened to play bass. There are big ideas here – God, human purpose, the future – but they're delivered alongside hooks that subscribe to the "nursery rhymes on crystal meth" maxim of early Blink. It's all about clear communication.

"I'm a big believer that when you find a vibration that speaks to you, it can change the way you feel, the way you think," says DeLonge. "That's why you have bands that come out and people start dressing like them and thinking like them. They discover something about themselves because of a band they discovered. This is group-consciousness stuff. This is resonating with other lifeforms. This is the ingredients and math of the universe." **G**

***Lifeforms* is out now through Rise Records**

BLUES POWER

After using lockdown to recover from 13 years of non-stop touring, Joanne Shaw Taylor took the opportunity to team up with Joe Bonamassa and Josh Smith to finally fulfil her long-held dream of making a blues cover album

WORDS RACHEL ROBERTS
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Joanne Shaw Taylor might spend a lot of time Stateside these days but, as we Zoom with her from Detroit, it's clear the guitarist hasn't lost a drop of her Midlands accent. Like many of us, she spent plenty of lockdown in front of the TV (while also learning to cook), but also used her time out to put together her latest record, a collection of blues covers simply titled *The Blues Album*.

"I consider myself a blues guitarist but I don't think any of my albums have been particularly bluesy," says Taylor, her long blonde hair flipped to one side, a quirky caricature of Albert King in the background. "I didn't think I could write blues songs so it was something I'd always wanted to do but felt like my vocals weren't quite good or mature enough. It gets ignored a lot. I think people focus so much on how prominent guitar playing is in blues that they forget people like BB King and Albert King were amazing singers, so it was important to cash up for that."

The Blues Album was conceived during the height of the pandemic, through conversations with friend and fellow blues-guitar stalwart, Joe Bonamassa. "I started talking to Joe most Fridays, having a glass of wine and putting the world to rights," she recalls. "I told him I was gonna do a blues cover album 'cause I always wanted to, and my voice was well rested so I started sending him ideas."

Taylor is candid about how the enforced downtime gave her the sort of luxurious break she's rarely been afforded during her career, and how it enabled her to recharge in a valuable and transformative way.

"That was really good, connecting to what was important and just having time off," she says. "I didn't touch a guitar for the first 10 weeks. I think it's the first time I remembered why I started doing this, and how much it means to me."

FRIENDS INDEED

The time off clearly gave Taylor some perspective and, having found her passion for guitar again, she was able to determine that friendship and self-care were vital ingredients in the process of getting back to music.

"I'd had some good rest and was excited to get back but I made the decision that whatever I did from now on I had to look after myself better," she says. "Joe's my best friend so it was great to go down to Nashville to stay with him and record the album. It's like working with family."

The pair may collaborate harmoniously when it comes to music but the transatlantic cultural divide yielded some more discordant moments while Taylor and Bonamassa binge-watched TV together. "I got him into watching *The Crown*, which was quite an achievement! We had to pause every 10 minutes as he kept asking questions: 'The Queen's dead?' 'No!'"

HALE BR
SHE

"IT'S UPTEMPO, IT'S FUNKY. YOU NEVER WANNA LEAD WITH A BALLAD IN CASE PEOPLE THINK YOU'VE TURNED INTO NORAH JONES"

It's fitting, then, that Taylor left Sony's Silvertone imprint, which she joined in 2018, to sign to JoBo's new record label KTBA (Keeping The Blues Alive). "I never imagined signing to a major label," she says of the Sony deal. "It just kind of fell in my lap." Moving out of the major-label orbit, however, is always a risk. But Taylor was sure the time was right and felt that working with Bonamassa and his longtime manager Roy Weisman at KTBA would be the best way for her to realise her creative vision.

"I've been signed to labels that pretty much just leave me alone and let me do what I wanna do, which is pretty sensible on their part really," she says, with a mischievous chuckle. "Do not get in my way! I love Sony and my time there was brilliant but I've known Joe and Roy for 15 years. I spoke to my dad about it and he said, 'I trust Roy more than I trust you to be honest, love'. Thanks, dad!"

The switch seems to have been a good decision, as Taylor worked with Bonamassa and co-producer and session ace Josh Smith to push herself as a singer, while the sessions at Nashville's Ocean Way Studios also gave her the chance to tick something big off her bucket list, thanks to the presence of JoBo regular Reese Wynans on keys.

"He was a hero of mine," says Taylor, gushing. "He used to play with Stevie Ray Vaughan, who is the guy that got me into guitar, so having him in the studio was really weird – to think of being that 12-year-old girl in Solihull thinking, 'I wanna live in Texas and be a blues guitarist and play with Reese Wynans!'"

With such sensational collaborators in the studio, Taylor chose to strip back her gear and keep things simple – but without compromising quality. "We wanted to use a very simple set up," she says. "No pedals, just get a really good live tone and then carry that through the whole album. I took down my main guitar, which is Junior, a '66 Esquire, and then plugged into a Dumble Overdrive and a '62 Deluxe."

EASY DECISION

Eclectic and varied, *The Blues Album* pays due reverence to the greats of the genre but eschews the obvious in favour of rare gems by the likes of Albert King, Peter Green and Aretha Franklin. For the album's first single, Taylor picked the cut that spoke the most to her: *Let Me Down Easy* originally by Little Milton.

ABOVE Joanne Shaw Taylor playing '66 Fender Esquire, known as Junior, on stage at London's O2 Shepherd's Bush Empire in March 2019

OPPOSITE Taylor with her 2007 Lemon Burst Gibson Les Paul Standard

© Ollie Millington / Redferns

"PEOPLE SAY 'YOU'RE MY FAVOURITE FEMALE GUITARIST.' WHAT DOES THAT EVEN MEAN? I DON'T PLAY GUITAR WITH MY OVARIES"

"There were six tracks we could have chosen from but that was the most upbeat one," she says. "You never wanna lead with a ballad in case people think you've turned into Norah Jones. It's uptempo, it's funky and one of my favourite songs."

ROAD WARRIOR

Like many artists, the time has now come for Taylor to head back on tour. But while the extended break helped her recentre her love for music and prioritise her mental health, it also gave rise to nerves regarding her return to the stage. "I was having panic attacks about having to go back," she says. "But it was partly knowing what frame of mind I was in when I stopped."

To calm her anxieties, Taylor hosted a small warm-up event back in July, which did her the world of good. "Now I'm looking forward to going back," she says. "I think there will be some challenges but being able to tour is better than not being able to tour."

While chatting about getting back to gigging and everything that entails, we hit upon a less enthusing topic: the sexism Taylor faces as a woman carving out her place in the male-dominated world of blues guitar.

"People say, 'You're my favourite female guitarist,'" she sighs. "What does that even mean? I don't play guitar with my ovaries, they don't affect what sound it makes!" As any woman who plays guitar or enjoys guitar music can likely attest, even wearing merch isn't without its challenges. "'Name three songs…'" she scoffs. "Why don't I play them for you instead?"

There have even been times when Taylor has been mistaken for someone's girlfriend when talking to her own fans. "I took my drummer Perry to a gig and we left through the band exit. There were some fans and they recognised Perry and started talking to him about Joanne Shaw Taylor and I was standing right next to him," she says, adding that every time she tried to join in with conversation she was ignored. "His wife noticed that I was Joanne – she was smiling at me, whispering, 'I'm so sorry.'"

With *The Blues Album* on the shelves and her fire rekindled, Joanne Shaw Taylor is ready for the stage, with a clearer state of mind and a buzz for the blues like never before. Her irreverent humour, positive attitude and gratitude for who and where she is today is precisely the spirit we need as we fans re-enter the world of live music too. However, she has one final, very important message about the album: "If you don't like it, it's Joe Bonamassa's fault!" G

***The Blues Album* is out now on KTBA Records**

CITY OF LIGHT

Public Service Broadcasting have spent their career weaving guitar, electronic instruments and sampled historic newsreels and archive footage into something wholly unique. For new album, *Bright Magic*, guitarist J Willgoose Esq decided to do something altogether different: decamp to Berlin to create a concept album about a city whose magnetic pull has drawn artists from across the globe. Along the way, he found a new appreciation of the guitar as a textural instrument, got to throw up the horns for the first time on record, and found his new musical muse in a German flea market

WORDS JOSH GARDNER **PORTRAITS** ALEX ROSS **LIVE** SHAUN GORDON

You won't read this in many self-help books but sometimes the best thing you can do in life is to give up. That's what J Willgoose Esq – the dapper, bespectacled creative force behind electronic rock outfit Public Service Broadcasting – did in about 2009. It turned out to be the best decision he ever made.

"I stopped trying to be an average guitarist in an indie band, because I'd tried that lots of times and failed," says Willgoose. "I was just doing stuff for my own amusement really. I was approaching 30 so I just thought, 'It's not going to happen now, I may as well just do something that's fun and, if I need to drag my mates to the pub to watch it, then it may as well be something fun for them to watch as well, y'know?'"

These aims would coalesce into the fledgling Public Service Broadcasting, a band that melded synths, electronic beats and Willgoose's proggy guitar with snippets from old public-information films, telling stories through music that sought to, as is neatly summed up by PSB's debut album title: *Inform. Educate. Entertain*.

Since that first album in 2013, Willgoose has been joined by fellow multi-instrumentalists Wrigglesworth and JF Abraham, in creating a series of concept albums and EPs that cover historical topics as disparate as the Space Race to the death of South Wales' coal industry.

"I WOULD HATE TO BE CALLED A COLLECTOR. YOU SHOULDN'T BUY THINGS TO COLLECT THEM, YOU SHOULD BUY THEM TO PLAY"

But for the band's fourth full-length, *Bright Magic*, Willgoose's muse drew him in a different direction. He was going to write an album about Berlin.

"I didn't really know why I wanted to write an album about Berlin," he admits. "I just felt this draw to it, kind of like a magnet really. Something about Berlin is just really cool. So I think writing the record was just kind of like, 'How has this city achieved that status in my head and millions of heads around the world?' What is it about the city? What is it about the people who've been there and built their myths around it, like Bowie and Dietrich? And in answering those questions, the record started to write itself."

LET THERE BE LIGHT

As with 2017's *Every Valley*, for which Willgoose embedded in Wales' Ebbw Vale Miner's Institute to create the record, here he decamped, pre-pandemic, to Berlin, and to that city's most evocative musical touchstone, Hansa. From Bowie and Iggy Pop to U2 and Depeche Mode, the famous studio has played a massive role in the musical history of Berlin. For, Willgoose, spending nine months writing there was not without its challenges.

"It was definitely a place where, if you were looking for a good taste of imposter syndrome, it was available freely, pretty much every day as you walked through the doors," says Willgoose. "You're putting yourself in that situation and it's just not possible to achieve anything like what those people – especially Bowie and Visconti – achieved in that building. So it was a bit fraught. I don't find writing very fun, or very easy… maybe it's not supposed to be. I'm always a little bit harsh on myself anyway but I think being in a foreign city without my usual support network of friends and family around me, it was a little bit more bruising. Maybe that's a good thing, maybe it was totally unnecessary and just a world of pain that I inflicted on myself for no good reason. But we'll never know."

Bright Magic is a very different record for Public Service Broadcasting, and one for which Willgoose embraced the guitar as a more esoteric instrument, as the electronic sounds that have long formed Berlin's heartbeat naturally took a more starring role.

"I think that kind of synthy sound was washing around in my head anyway, so the guitars are being used a bit more texturally," he reflects. "A lot of the drones that you hear, a lot of the washes of sound start out on the guitar and they're built up with little loops or little pitch-shifted bits or phasers.

"On stuff like *Gib Mir Das Licht*, all the pad-y sounds that run through it, it's all guitars. It'd be really interesting to be able to go through the album and be like, 'This is a guitar, this is a guitar, this is a guitar…' Because it's stuff that you wouldn't necessarily think it was. It's adding textural body to it, and expression and depth, which I'm probably more competent at creating with a guitar. But it's so funny, there are so many layers to so much of it, and a track like *People, Let's Dance!* was genuinely ridiculous – it ended up with about 250 tracks on that project! But it suffered when I took stuff out. I do this thing when I'm writing and mixing, I mute stuff and I go, 'Is it better with or better without?' And it was so strange, because everything was doing something important. If you took any element out, it lost something, which in such a densely layered piece felt very unusual to me. I think maybe that speaks to how important the guitar as a textural instrument is to the record."

IN THE KNOW

Despite guitar being less of an overt presence for much of *Bright Magic*, when it comes to the fore, it does so with a vengeance, as on standout *Der Rhythmus der Maschinen*. The track sees Willgoose, in his words, "kinda trying to sound like St Vincent… and just really letting rip for once". It's not something that we've seen much of on previous PSB records.

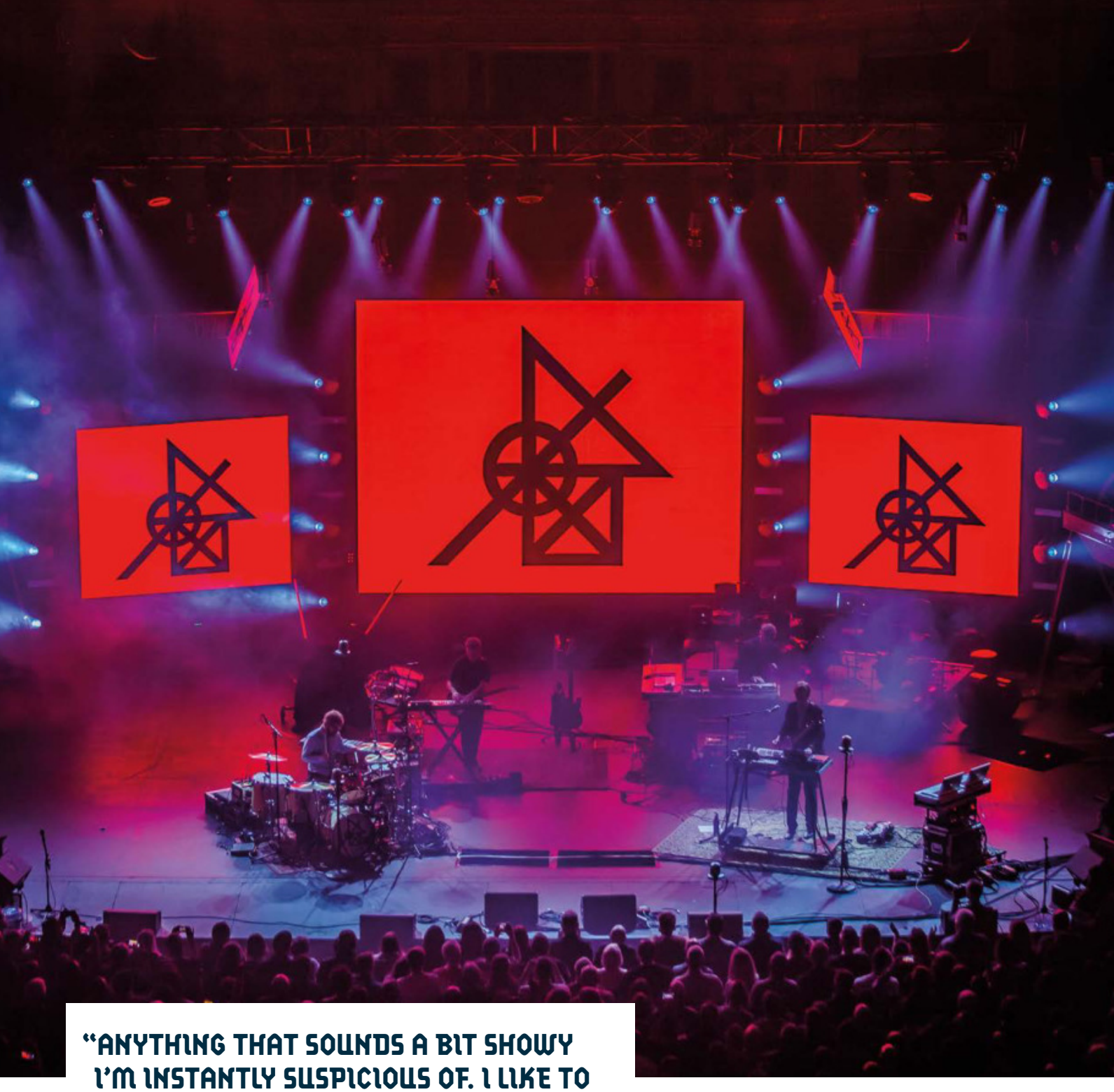
"There's not too many times where I've done that in our stuff," he agrees. "It just felt nice to have a little bit of 'horns-in-the-air' nonsense I suppose. I've done it before on some demos but I always take it out because anything that sounds a bit showy to me I'm instantly suspicious of. I quite like to go a bit under the radar as a guitar player."

Going under the radar is something of an antithesis to what most guitar players want to do when they strap on a guitar. But for Willgoose, that kind of uncover contribution has always been the goal.

"The focus of this show is often elsewhere," he says. "Either on the visual elements or the lights or, y'know, Wrigglesworth is an incredible performer and drummer and JF Abraham is much more kinetic on stage than the rest of us are. So, there's a lot of things taking attention away from me, which I really appreciate! It's been designed that way. It's not an ego trip. I quite enjoy that. I can just get on with it."

That said, while he doesn't hog the limelight with his guitar playing, Willgoose appreciates it when his peers notice what he's trying to do.

"I remember when we toured *The Race For Space*, we had Smoke Fairies [Katherine Blamire and Jessica Davies] with us. They're both good guitar players but I particularly love Katherine's playing," he says. "By the time we got to the London gig on that tour, she snuck up alongside me and went, 'You're actually a good guitarist, aren't you? A lot of the stuff you're doing is hard but you're not making a big deal out of it…'



"ANYTHING THAT SOUNDS A BIT SHOWY I'M INSTANTLY SUSPICIOUS OF. I LIKE TO GO UNDER THE RADAR AS A GUITARIST"

And I was like, 'That is exactly what I want to hear. Thank you very much.' There is a level of skill and technical proficiency to it but it's not too 'I want everyone paying attention to me', because that couldn't be further from the truth. So it's technically quite difficult but I think it does sail a bit under the radar, and I do quite like that to be honest. Then when your peers recognise it, that is truly lovely."

ROLLING WITH IT

Given Public Service Broadcasting's very leftfield approach to creating music, you'd be forgiven for assuming that Willgoose's guitar background was as esoteric as the influences his band pull in. But the reality is much more relatable.

"I remember Noel Gallagher being on the cover of a magazine about 10 years ago saying, 'I'm the reason you play the guitar'. I thought, 'Actually, fair enough, you're right on that one'. It was Oasis, and it's easy to look back on them now and think like, what a bunch of plodding, middle-of-the-road stuff it turned out to be, but that first record was so exciting when it came out. It has that on-the-edge, loud guitar-music element to it. It was just so exciting. I think I was about 13 or 14 and it was the perfect time to hear it. They were quite easy songs to learn as well, so it was a good way to get into it. I got the Squier guitar pack from the local guitar shop for Christmas and that was me off."

From here, Willgoose moved towards trying to master the more complicated guitar turned out by the likes of Radiohead and Manic Street Preachers during the mid and late 1990s. "I started trying to learn some of Jonny Greenwood's stuff, then Ed O'Brien's stuff and Thom Yorke's stuff as well.

STARFIRE I
STARFIRE I SC IN SEAFOAM GREEN
GUILD'S MOST ICONIC ELECTRIC –
NOW AVAILABLE TO A WHOLE NEW
GENERATION OF PLAYERS.
NEW
STARFIRE I
STARTING AT $499 USD
LEARN MORE AT
GUILDGUITARS.COM/STARFIRE-I-SERIES
GUILD
Made TO BE Played
SINCE 1953

"IT SOUNDS WEIRD TO BE INFLUENCED BY A YOUTUBE CHANNEL FOR A RECORD BUT I THINK IT WAS DEFINITELY THE CASE"

And then it was the Manics and James Dean Bradfield's parts, which are like, 'Oh god, this is very difficult'. Try playing the chord progression from *Design For Life* cleanly! It's not a big showy part but try to move from the third chord in that progression to the fourth without hitting some horrible buzz or something – it's not easy."

Everyone remembers when they got their first *proper* guitar. For Willgoose, there were two instruments that made him feel like he had made a giant leap – and both still play an important role in PSB today.

"I got a Japanese Jaguar when I was in my late teens," he says. "I'd never played one, I just thought it looked like the coolest thing ever – and I still do. They're just amazing-looking guitars. I still use it. It's been through various set-ups and iterations and stuff, and now it's very similar to the Johnny Marr Signature – very simplified and it's got Bare Knuckle pickups in it, which sound great. Then I went abroad to America for a summer to work when I was at university, and I saved up enough money there to buy a Rickenbacker 330 – that was the one. I remember buying that and, in the little leaflet it comes with, it says, 'Congratulations, you now own a world-class musical instrument', and I think that was the first time it felt like, 'Oh no, yeah, it feels like I do'. It doesn't get quite as much love these days, my Ricky, but it's on every record and it's all over the first record in particular. More guitars need 24 frets, that's the thing!"

FILLING THE GAPS

As PSB's music has evolved, so has Willgoose's guitar stable, with the guitarist placing great value on being able to cover as many bases as possible both live and in the studio.

"I was talking with Editors' guitar tech when we were on the road with them and we agreed that the sound of real maturity as a guitar player was coming to love and use the Strat more," says Willgoose. "That definitely has happened in the past few years. I think John Squire said that playing a Strat on stage was like wearing a tie or something. It just felt too stiff and formal. But after a while, you start to recognise that there's a reason so many of the greats played them. And they're so versatile, and so many of the sounds that you get from it you can try and fake on other guitars but you can't, you can't really get that out-of-phase sort of sound any other way. It just doesn't sound the same."

This desire to fill in the gaps in his sonic arsenal also led to the creation of the most unique guitar in Willgoose's collection: a P-90-loaded double-cut signature model with a Jazzmaster vibrato made by Cambridge's Fidelity Guitars.

"Matt [Oram] got in touch out of the blue and just said, 'I make these guitars, what do you think, would you like one?' And that's always a good way to get my attention," Willgoose tells us about the birth of his partnership with one of the UK's most exciting new guitar brands. "I think that guitar for me was almost about filling in some of the few gaps that I have in my guitar collection. I didn't have any P-90 stuff at the time but it was also coming along at a time when I was trying to find an interesting new sound. So the guitar wasn't created with anything specific in mind and it wasn't even necessarily created to match the way that I play or to be like, 'If you wanna sound like me, get this guitar'. That's not what the purpose of the guitar was."

Armed with a new spellbinding sound, the P-90-equipped signature model became the main guitar on PSB's 2018 EP *White Star Liner*, and even influenced the way that record was written – "new guitars always do". Its use on *Bright Magic*, however, was limited.

"I don't think I used the signature the new record," says Willgoose, "because the room I had in Hansa – it's a great building and everything, amazing history… but terrible electrical problems! And playing with P-90s in that was just a recipe for the loudest hum you've ever heard. I tried it on a couple of tracks and it sounded great but the hum was unusable. So it was quietly and regrettably put to the back of the queue."

Far from being a one-time deal, however, the relationship between Willgoose and Fidelity is evolving, with phase two on the horizon.

"I don't want to jump the gun but for this record I got a custom Stellarosa, and I think [Matt] is talking about making that a new signature model and quietly retiring the old one," says Willgoose. "The set-up that I've got for that Stellarosa, I love it. That's a versatile and cool guitar as well – when we were in the studio, it came into its own in that environment because it just sounded so great on so many things."

PEDAL POWER

Look at shots of PSB in the studio and you'll notice an abundance of high-end boutique pedals strewn across the floor – 1981 Inventions, Jackson Audio, EarthQuaker, Land Devices, Hudson Electronics… it's clear that Willgoose is a pedal guy. But one thing he definitely isn't is a pedal *collector*.

"No!" he exclaims when we pose the question. "If that's your thing, fine, but I would hate to be called a collector. You shouldn't buy things to collect them, you should buy them to play them! I'm pretty good at selling the stuff I don't use now. Collecting stuff depresses me. It's more about just the creative inspiration you get from, well… it's buying new toys basically, isn't it? You're trying to create that playful atmosphere, and they do help. Y'know, I have to do a good job of explaining that sometimes for certain members of my household... but they *do* inspire creativity!" We know the feeling.

Willgoose's pedal obsession has been fuelled by a relatable source too – the explosion of diverse and interesting YouTubers who have helped foster our current golden age of stompboxes.

"For years the only pedal demos you could find were just blues lawyer-types riffing over stuff," he says of the bad old days. "You're like, 'Ugh, you've got the drive always set to maximum! I don't wanna hear the maximum I want to hear it break up 'cause that's what I'm after.' It was a torturous experience trying to find out what a pedal sounded like before you bought one.

Willgoose managing his signature Fidelity guitar as well as synths and samples on stage at Dublin's Olympia Theatre in January 2019

But now there's so many artful people. The Knobs channel is the one that set the bar so high. It led to me buying a load of stuff before realising, it's not the stuff, it's him. A lot of the more interesting sounds on *Bright Magic* probably came from trying to copy some of the techniques from that channel. He's got a distinct way of playing that I don't get anywhere near but certainly his general approach is what I try to take on board with making these more textural sounds. It sounds weird to be influenced by a YouTube channel for a record but I think it was definitely the case."

STRING THEORY

Pedals aside, Willgoose also explored some more unconventional avenues to create *Bright Magic*'s dense, layered sonic palette. The album features the sound of various lightbulbs, hit or smashed and then fed through harmonisers and synths, with the shards then turned into impromptu shakers. Then there's the *kantele*, a zither-style Finnish folk instrument that Willgoose picked up at Berlin flea market. It ended up an important addition to the record.

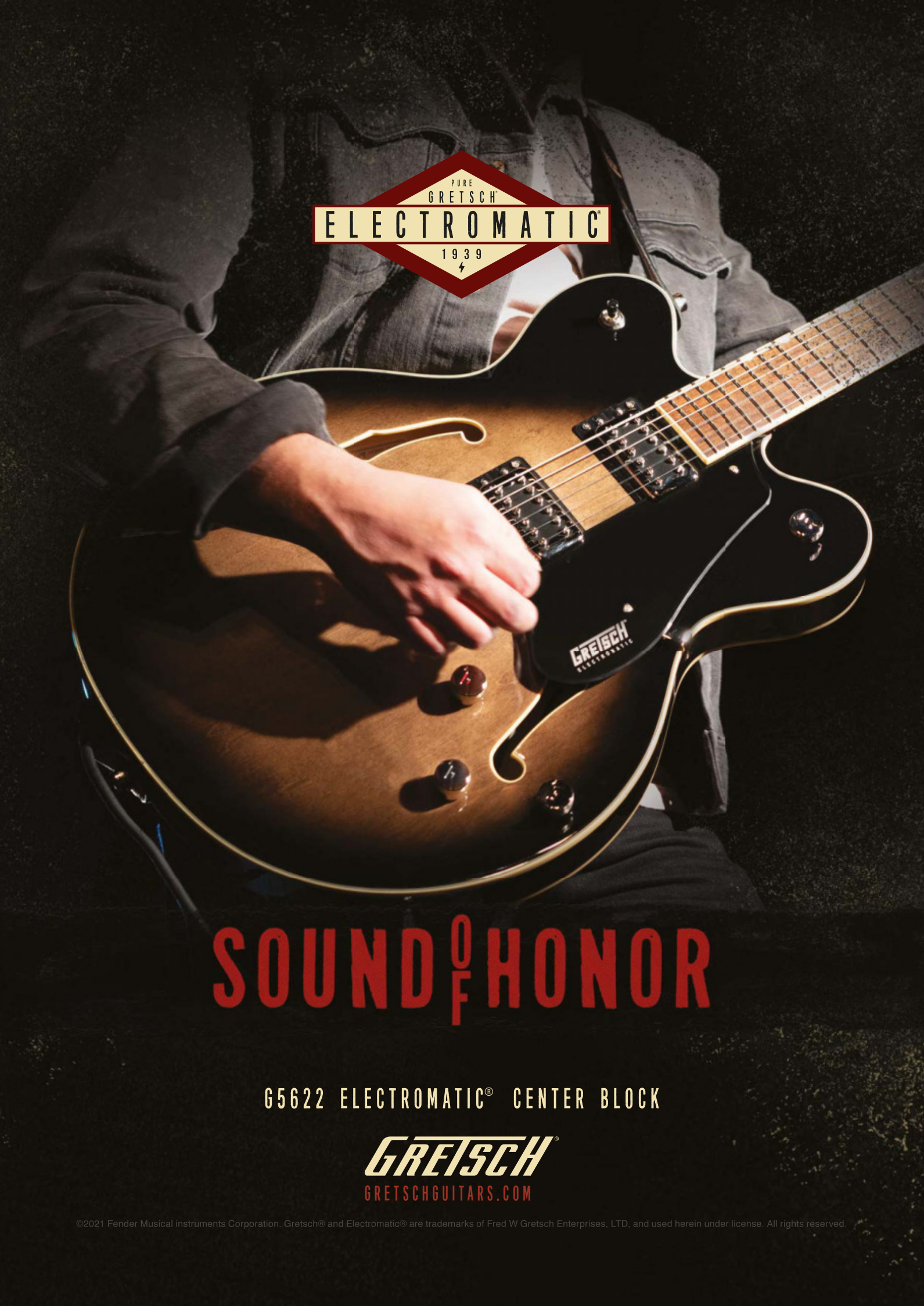
"I was going around the free markets in Berlin looking for old lightbulbs – because I'm an interesting guy," Willgoose jokes. "I was somewhere in Prenzlauer – the famous flea market – and this guy had a few stringed instruments there for sale, and this one was made in Berlin, which is strange because it's a Finnish folk instrument. There was obviously a demand for them in Berlin. I don't know if it's a particularly fine example of the *kantele* or not and I'm almost certainly not playing it right, but I was looking for something like *Moss Garden* on *Heroes*, where Bowie uses a koto – that very otherworldly plucked sound – and this gave me an element of that. It's doubling a lot of the synth parts and it's doubling some of the piano in some instances. It just gives you that really bright attack but, because the notes ring out as well, you get really interesting resonances."

It's a far cry from boutique pedals and fancy synthesisers that make up the rest of *Bright Magic* but, given its contribution to the record, it was clearly a bargain. Well, maybe.

"It's probably the best 20 euros I ever spent," says Wilgoose. "I was ready for him to try and rip me off, because my German wasn't great and I obviously looked like I didn't know what I was talking about. Actually, maybe I did get ripped off. Maybe it's a piece of crap and it's only worth two euros. Still, it's on the record!" **G**

***Bright Magic* is out now on PIAS**

© Kieran Frost / Redferns / Getty Images



©2021 Fender Musical instruments Corporation. Gretsch® and Electromatic® are trademarks of Fred W Gretsch Enterprises, LTD, and used herein under license. All rights reserved.

GO GO GADGET GUITAR

Charting the rise, fall and rehabilitation of guitars with onboard tech

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

The first time someone fitted fancy gadgetry to a guitar, it unleashed terrifying satanic forces upon the world and turned an entire generation into gibbering delinquents. In other words, it was a wonderful success. So can you blame people for spending the best part of a century trying to match it?

That first gadget was, of course, the electro-magnetic pickup – a little innovation that, after a few decades of tweaks, was powerful enough to turn the gentle six-string into the driving force of that ungodly phenomenon known as rock 'n' roll. Not a bad starting point for our history of guitars with built-in technological enhancements.

However, this is a story with far more misses than hits. You might look at the new Boss Eurus GS-1 – which packs an advanced polyphonic synth engine into what looks like an otherwise traditional two-pickup S-type – and speculate that its odds of globe-straddling success are perhaps on the long side. But there's evidence to suggest that us plank-janglers aren't quite as conservative as we often think we are…

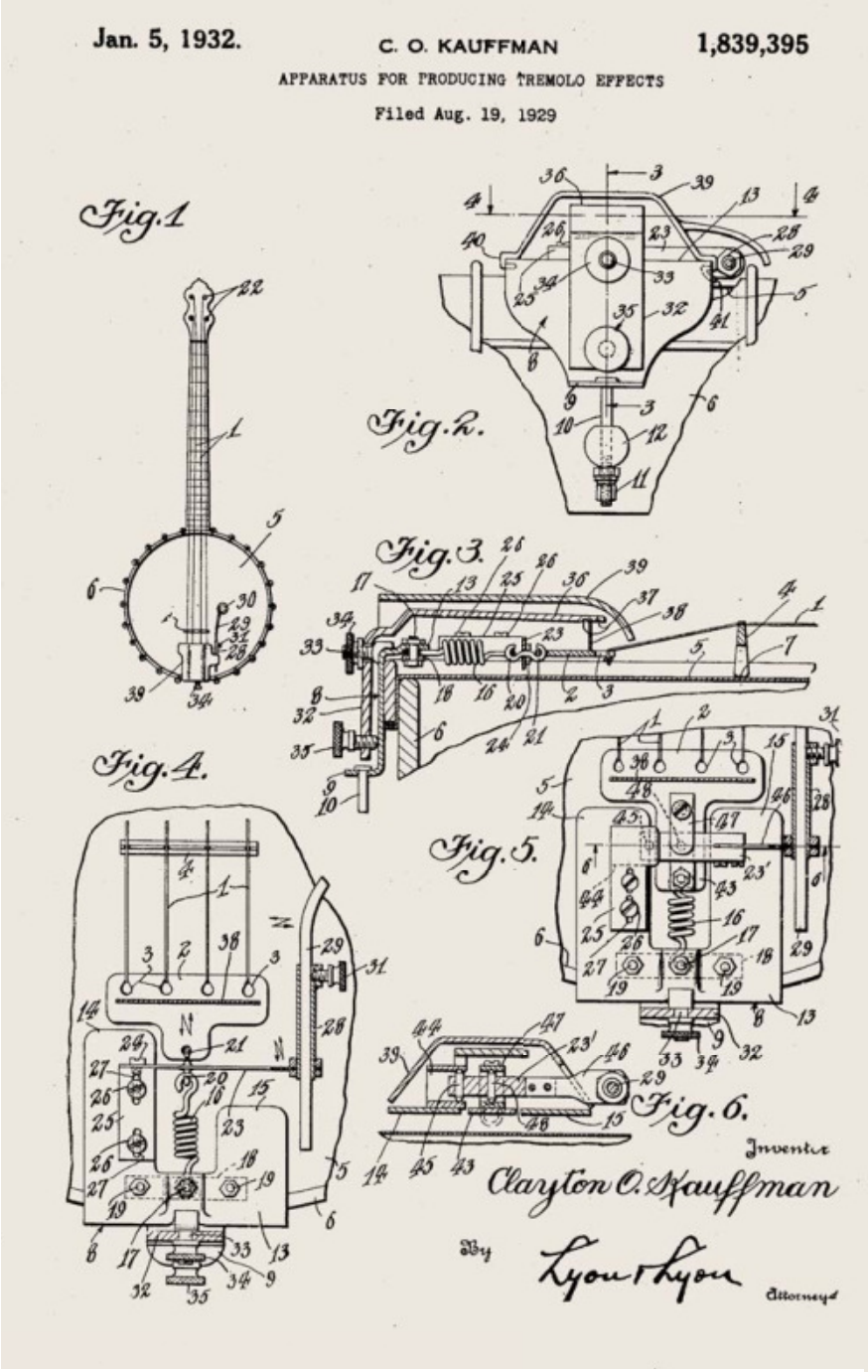
ARE TRENDS ELECTRIC?

First, we ought to nail down our definition of 'tech'. Here, we're focusing purely on the electrical and the electronic, otherwise half of this feature would be dedicated to whammy bars. We won't be dwelling on Doc Kauffman's pioneering vibrato system of 1929, nor on single-string pitch-changers such as the B-Bender, nor even on the barmiest-looking doohickey ever screwed to the face of a guitar: the Rickenbacker 'comb' of 1966, which let you switch between 12-string and six-string formats by physically pulling half the strings out of the way.

If we narrow things down further to exclude gadgets that are essentially useless, we must bid farewell to another Rickenbacker idea: the 331 Light Show model of the early 1970s, beneath whose transparent top was an array of coloured lamps set to glow in sync with its output. Think that's daft? Don't tell Matt Bellamy. One of his Manson 'Mattocaster' guitars is fitted with lasers that respond to playing dynamics in the same way. Mind you, it's said to weigh a tonne and he hasn't gigged it since 2007. Lights don't have to be purely cosmetic though. Various companies today are making LED fret markers to aid navigation on dark stages, while the Fretlight teaching system uses embedded LEDs to show novices where to place their fingers. It's not world-changing, but it's clever.

Anyway, whammies aside, this is all peripheral stuff. It's time to turn our attention to what most guitarists are really interested in: drowning out the drummer.

EARLY TECH-TOTING GUITARS DIDN'T SO MUCH BLAZE A TRAIL AS WHACK A FEW NETTLES WITH A WALKING STICK



AMP PAIN SUPERNOVA

The most obvious piece of technology to build into a guitar is an amplifier. That way you don't need… well, an amplifier. This is something several makers tried during that most fearlessly forward-thinking of decades, the 1960s.

Höfner seems to have got there first with the Fledermausgitarre (bat guitar). An odd-shaped beast with a four-watt solid-state amp built into the top part of its body, it was it created for the 1960 Musikmesse expo but never went into full production, probably because the amp and its motorcycle battery made it too heavy to play. However, Another European pioneer, Antonio 'Wandre' Pioli, would take this concept further with his Bikini model, made in Italy by the Davoli Krundaal company for at least two years in the early 60s. This had a 1x8 transistor combo in a separate pod bolted to the main body, as well as a jack output for plugging into a proper amp, just in case.

The Japanese weren't far behind with the Teisco TRG-1 of 1964, which improved on its predecessors by actually *looking* like a guitar. What do all these amped-up creations have in common? To put it bluntly, they all died on their arses. Rory Gallagher used a TRG-1 on some of his last recordings, and Ace Frehley of Kiss was pictured with a Bikini in the early 80s (we're not sure he ever played it). But the practicalities of weight and power supply ensured that this idea never really caught on.

Vox's bid to revive the idea with its 2011 Apache range of travel guitars was not successful either. But in the current age of mini-amps and super-efficient batteries, you do have some solid all-in-one options. These include the hi-tech Fusion Guitar, ElectroPhonic Innovations instruments with built-in stereo speakers and effects, the kid-friendly Loog Pro VI Electric and – from a brand with serious pedigree in portable amplification – the Pignose PGG-200.

But let's be realistic. What we're looking at here is a clutch of niche tools designed primarily for fun, travel, maybe for a bit of busking. Installing an amp in a serious guitar for gigging or recording doesn't make much sense in the modern world. Scale things down to just effects, though, and things suddenly get a lot more lively.

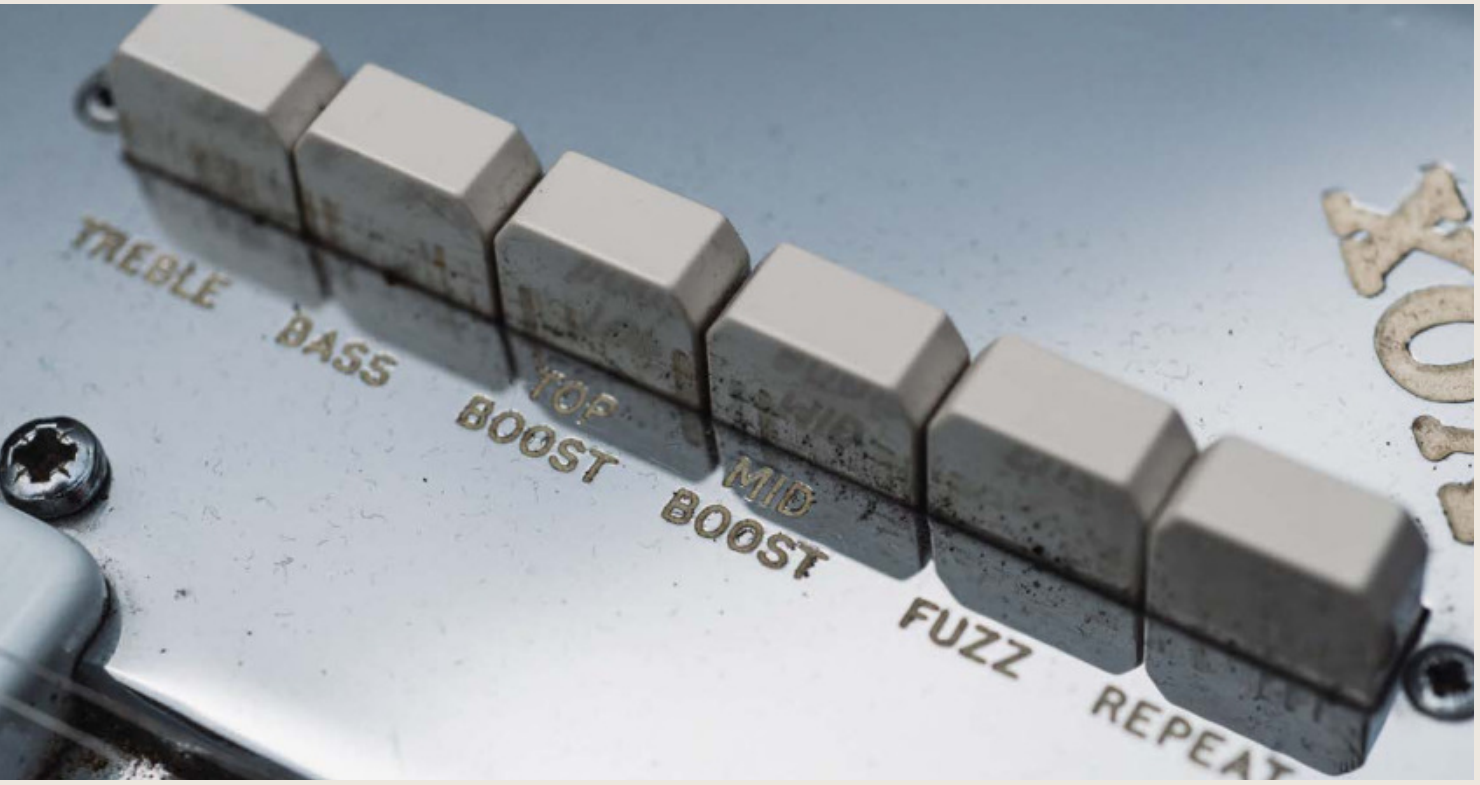
I WANNA EFFECTS YOU UP

It's time for another definition. What exactly are effects? For our purposes, they are sonic manipulators that do more than just filtering, boosting or switching. So the Vari-tone dial on the 1959 Gibson ES-345, the active circuitry inside the 1963 Burns TR2, the Orgeltone spring-loaded volume control fitted to the 1965 Framus Strato, the middle and treble boosters hidden in the 1983 Fender Elite Stratocaster – they don't count.

Besides, old Doc Kauffman got there before all of them: he produced a motorised version of his vibrola for Rickenbacker in 1937. That must surely be the first-ever onboard effect, right? Well, it's only slightly undermined by the fact that it required mains power to operate.

Our next candidate, then, is the Epiphone Professional from 1962… and it's immediately disqualified for cheating. This elegant semi-acoustic had reverb and tremolo controls on its giant butterfly-shaped pickguard but the effects themselves were actually found in the 35-watt amp it had to be plugged into (via a special cable) in order to work properly.

The Vox V262 Invader was introduced in 1967 and had a built in tuner, distortion, boost, wah and even 'repeat percussion'



This 1967 Vox Mark XII Special belonged to Rory Gallagher

For true onboard effects, you'd have to wait until 1966-67, a period that saw the launch of another strong effort from Höfner, plus a quartet of them from Vox. Hofner's 459VTZ was a close relative of Paul McCartney's violin bass but this six-string had built-in fuzz and tremolo circuits – the very same pairing found, along with a range of boosts, in Vox's Mark VI Special, Phantom VI Special and 12-string Phantom XII Special, plus the Mosrite-style V262 Invader. Ian Curtis can be seen strumming a white Phantom VI Special in the video for *Love Will Tear Us Apart* but the Invader was surely the pick of this bunch – as well as being the prettiest, it also included a wah effect operated by pushing down on a lever behind the bridge.

What is the legacy of these tech-toting trailblazers? In truth, they didn't so much blaze a trail as whack a few nettles out of the way with a walking stick. That is to say that others followed – but not in huge numbers.

Univox was one of the first with the Effector (also sold under the Kay brand), a Les Paul-shaped solidbody with fuzz, two kinds of tremolo and two phasing effects, all powered by a single nine-volt battery. Then came the Gretsch Chet Atkins 7680 Super Axe of 1977, whose expansive body hid a phaser and a compressor. The Japanese-made Electra MPC range of the same era offered modular effects that clipped into the back of the body. Even the Soviets got involved, with the Formanta (AKA Borisov) Solo-2, which had a fuzz circuit and looked like a Fisher-Price Jazzmaster.

Rickenbacker returns to our story in 1988 with its compressor-equipped signature model built for Roger McGuinn, the 370/12RM. Meanwhile, Fender had a bash at the end of the 1980s too, with its distortion-equipped Heartfield RR9. But there then followed a lean spell through the bone-dry grunge era of the 1990s. By the time we next saw a notable guitar with in-built effects, in 2001, the idea had become rather retro. This was the Danelectro Innuendo, with distortion, chorus, tremolo and echo circuits engaged via little push-buttons on the control panel. It was a fun instrument but it had a whiff of novelty about it.

ABOVE Jimmy Page used the Roland G-707 while composing the soundtrack for the 1982 action film Death Wish II

LEFT The Univox Effector was sold through the Sears catalogue

But again, the principle lives on. Remember Matt Bellamy's lasers? Well, there's nothing so frivolous about the tech built into some of his other Manson guitars, including a Korg Kaoss Pad and versions of the Z.Vex Wah Probe and Fuzz Factory. The Muse man has also been known to use a kill-button – alright, we've already said that a switch doesn't count as an effect – and both the Fernandes Sustainer and Sustainiac systems for generating infinite notes through internal feedback loops.

Then there's the rotary-style LesLee circuit offered on some German-made Deimel guitars, as well as US boutique maker Bilt's Relevator + Effects model, which features Bilt's own fuzz and MXR Carbon Copy delay as standard but was also fitted with modulated reverb for Sarah Lipstate's signature model in 2019. Just this summer, British brand Fidelity unveiled its one-off dB Baritone too, with an innovative whammy-controlled fuzz feedback circuit. Could the idea finally be catching on?

Oh, and Matt Bellamy's not quite done yet. After becoming the majority shareholder of Manson Guitar Works in 2019, he said of the company's future endeavours that it will "certainly be exploring enhanced electronic features to further evolve the guitar into the modern era". How might that evolution look? There's already been talk of a Manson model with a built-in DigiTech Whammy, so watch this space.

ROLAND'S ROSTER OF GUITAR SYNTH USERS INCLUDED ROBERT FRIPP, ADRIAN BELEW, ANDY SUMMERS AND JIMMY PAGE

LIVING IN A VOX

Of course, those "enhanced electronic features" that Bellamy talks of needn't be limited to effects, which brings us to the wildest projects in the history of Franken-luthiery: guitars that aren't even guitars. We're once again in the realm of things that seemed like a good idea in the 60s here (always a dangerous notion). But again it's clear that the wider concept never truly died.

Somewhere on YouTube there's a clip of Dick Denney, the man behind the Vox AC15 and AC30, appearing on an American panel show in the mid-60s. But he's not showing the celebrity guests a new amplifier. Complete with rakish goatee beard and incongruous Kent accent, Dick is there to demonstrate the Vox V251 Guitar Organ. First presented to Lennon and McCartney in 1964, the Guitar Organ was based on the same Phantom body as those later effects-laden Special models. But this was really a Vox Continental organ in disguise: each fret was a six-part electrical contact, and pressing a string down to touch one completed a circuit to generate the note.

Denney demonstrates the Guitar Organ's hybrid mode – to impressive effect – to the panel too, playing an organ melody with his left hand while strumming guitar chords with his right. Guess what, though? The instrument was simply too heavy and too complicated to catch on (just imagine how many wires there must have been running through the neck). The Beatles didn't like it, and it fizzled out in 1967.

There were more glorious failures too, notably the Italian-made Godwin Guitar Organ of the mid-70s, which followed the template laid out by Vox but added many more switches. Then there was the 1976 Hagstrom Swede Patch 2000, marketed as the first guitar synthesiser. A collaboration with Ampeg, this instrument again turned the frets into electric contacts. However, it required an external synth to generate the sounds, all of which meant it didn't survive into the 80s.

The Eurus GS-1 from Boss shows how far gadget guitars have come in the past few decades

SYNTHY IRRESISTIBLE

Pausing briefly to doff our cap at one more 70s oddity, the Guyatone LG-23R with its crude built-in drum machine, we now arrive at the heyday of keyboard pop, as well as various synth-makers' attempts to drag guitarists into this gleaming, shoulder-padded future.

Roland launched a series of analogue guitar synths beginning in 1977 with the GR-500. Like the Hagstrom, this was just a controller rather than a standalone sound-maker. Even so, by the time the futuristic G-707 model came out in '84, Roland's roster of users had expanded from obvious boundary-pushers such as Robert Fripp and Adrian Belew to include Andy Summers and even Jimmy Page.

Spurred on by the arrival of MIDI in 1983, Casio and Yamaha wanted a piece of the action too, and their various offerings were joined in 1985 by a distinctly unconventional British effort: the SynthAxe. But the tech still wasn't quite streamlined enough to make self-contained synth guitars viable – even if another maker from these isles, Stepp, gave it a go in 1986 with its DG-1, a device now remembered mostly for being the ugliest instrument ever made.

Casio finally came up with a genuine hybrid in 1988, the PG-380. This was a proper guitar – Strat-style body shape, two single-coils and a humbucker, Floyd Rose licensed bridge – but with an actual synth inside, triggered by a hexaphonic pickup and controlled by a panel of buttons and a two-digit display. By all accounts it was pretty decent; the only snag was that almost nobody wanted one.

Roland eventually scaled back its ambitions to designing hex pickups that could be fitted to just about any six-string, making the conversion from guitar to synth easy and, better still, reversible. Roland still sells those GK pickups to this day, along with a GR-55 processor to plug them into.

Which brings us rather neatly back to that new beast from Roland's guitar-centric stable, Boss. The Eurus GS-1 revives the self-contained concept by taking advantage of the fact that today's synthesiser tech is much more powerful and much more minute than it was in the 1980s. Like the Casio PG-380, the GS-1 can also be played as a regular guitar; unlike the Casio, it offers in-depth editing of its synth sounds via a dedicated smartphone app. Whether that means it's destined to take over the world is not yet clear but it certainly has a better shot than any of its clunky predecessors did.

Matt Bellamy is a standard bearer for modern guitars with built-in tech

LOVIN' THE FUTURE

There's one category we haven't touched on yet: the guitar that doesn't try to sound like an organ or a violin or a Stormtrooper's alarm clock, but simply some other guitars. It's been almost two decades since Line 6 released its first Variax, digitally modelling different tones in such a way that you could flip from a Telecaster to a dreadnought (or a banjo) with the twist of a rotary switch. Not everyone was immediately won over by the Variax but it's still going strong and currently comes in seven different flavours, including a couple of hard-rocking Shuriken models. It's been a success because, for all its technological complexity, it still looks and feels like an electric guitar – and a fairly low-key one at that.

The same can't be said of – sorry, we had to mention it – the Gibson Firebird X. Launched in 2011, this modelling monster was the culmination of a whole digital programme for Gibson, beginning with the string-splitting HD.6X-Pro in 2006. The reaction to the X was one of fierce negativity, sales were non-existent, and a now-infamous leaked video of unsold guitars being crushed by a bulldozer provided a fitting end to the company's futuristic adventure. In fact, it had soon abandoned even the Firebird X's least offensive techy feature: robot tuners, fitted to most electric models across the 2015 range but gone completely by 2019.

Then there was Moog. A brand name inextricably linked with synthesis, it had collaborated with Gibson in the late 1970s on the RD range of instruments, equipped with active preamps and compression and expansion circuits. A Moog-branded guitar arrived decades later in 2008 and even scooped Best In Show at Summer NAMM. But its innovative blend of sustain and filtering tech failed to capture the mainstream imagination and the Moog Guitar was later discontinued.

For the future of digital luthiery, then, the signs are mixed. Likewise, there surely will be more offerings with onboard effects, and perhaps headphone amps. But there's one very good reason not to expect a full-blown revolution in this field any time soon…

While continuing improvements in battery technology mean the issue of powering these circuits is less problematic than it used to be, one other snag remains: turning them on and off. Until someone invents the three-handed guitarist, stompboxes will surely remain the most practical way for players to enhance, mutate and pulverise the voice of the electric guitar – and that's just fine by us. **G**

© Eleanor Jane

THE COLLECTION

MOJO RISING

WORDS ED OLESZKO
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Known for his acclaimed range of hand-wound pickups and specialising in esoterica, Mojo Pickups founder Marc Ransley has a guitar collection that should set pulses racing among offset fans

Marc bought this heavily worn, all-original 1963 Fender Jaguar on eBay back in the early 2000s

Deep within the rolling green hills of West Yorkshire, nestled between the great British cities of Leeds and Manchester, lies the village of Ripponden. In contrast with the centuries-old exteriors of the sandstone buildings that line its narrow roads, the quaint village is also home to the headquarters of one of the most imaginative, creative and bleeding-edge brands in the guitar pickup business.

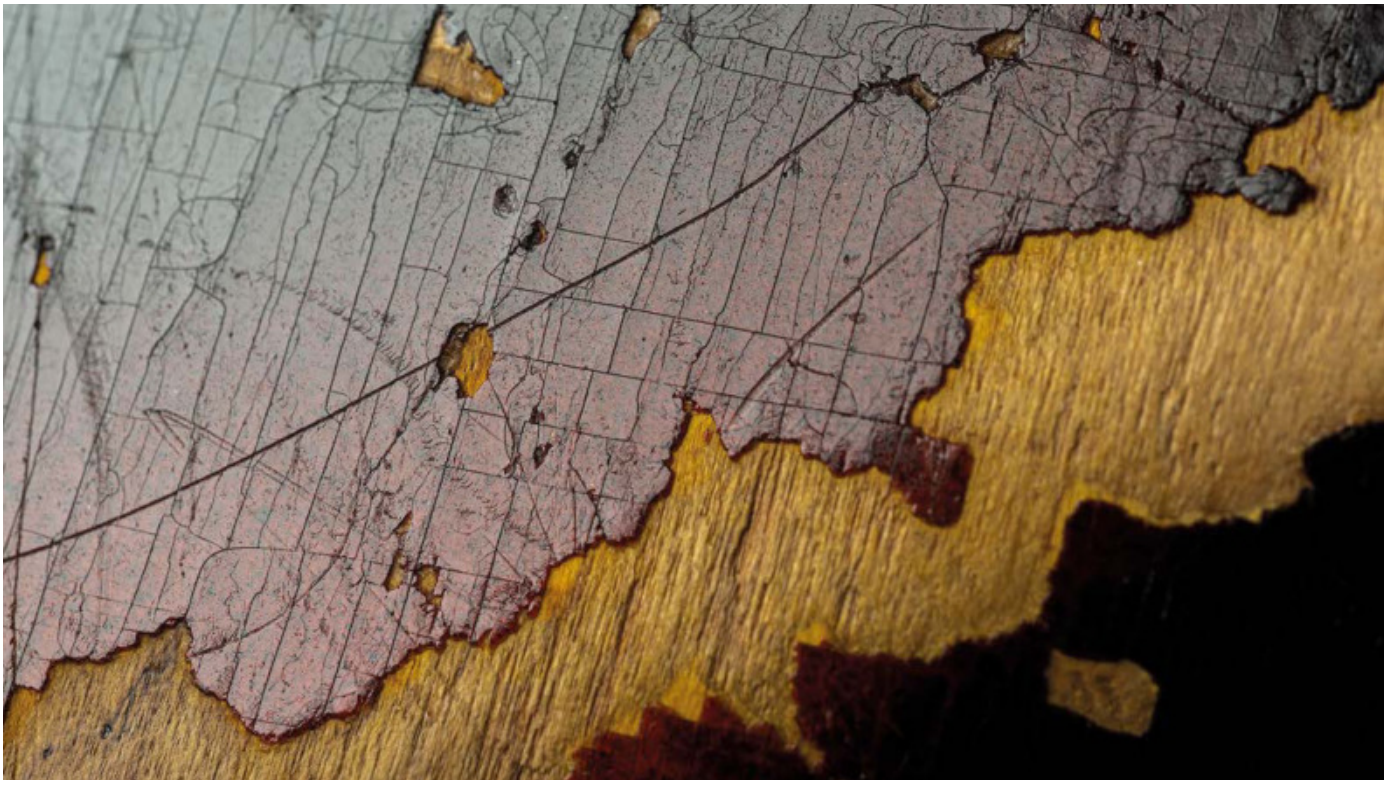
Mojo Pickups founder Marc Ransley not only creates custom guitar pickups and accessories, he is also the proud owner of one of the most eclectic, interesting and plain coolest guitar collections we've seen in quite some time. Vintage Jazzmasters, Jaguars and a Firebird bump elbows with Supro, Danelectro, Guyatone and Harmony guitars, while lap steels from the 1940s can be found next to vintage and custom-made amplifiers. It's not all old gear either – Marc's collection also includes the work of some of today's top luthiers, many of whose guitars feature pickups wound by the Mojo man himself.

A lifelong guitar player and enthusiast, Marc has been fixing and tweaking his guitars for as long as he can remember. As is often the case, this well-trodden DIY path led to him winding his own pickups and, eventually, establishing Mojo as his full-time job and business in 2010.

Before all that, though, like many music fans growing up in the 1980s, one record in particular proved life-changing for a young Marc.

"I must have been about 11 when *Appetite For Destruction* came out," he says, "and it just got me completely. I went from playing football to just being completely obsessed with guitars and music. I think I got a crappy catalogue acoustic for Christmas and it just went from there. As you get older and older and you get a bit of money, you just keep buying more and more guitars… well, I do!"

Fender JAGUAR
Tremolux Amp
VIBRATO
SPEED
INTENSITY
Fender



ABOVE The playwear on the Jaguar has worn right through to its alder body

OPPOSITE This superlative 1966 non-reverse Firebird sports a trio of P-90s

ART ROCKER

Marc played in bands as a teenager and continued to do so until he was "too old and uncool". "We had a lot of fun and some success," he says. "Festivals, MTV, a few recordings, that sort of thing." Though his intro to the guitar came via mainstream rock courtesy of Slash and Izzy Stradlin, Marc's taste in music has long been more leftfield, something reflected in his Mojo Pickups product line.

"I got into loads of American indie bands, like Pavement, Yo La Tengo and Sonic Youth to a certain extent, that kind of stuff that's typically called slacker music," he says. "There's one thing you might notice about my collection: that there are no humbuckers. They're just not my thing. I completely understand people that want that big thick creamy sound from them, and I have started making PAFs again due to demand, but you couldn't do the kind of music that I was into with them.

"Jazzmaster pickups, lipsticks, Dynasonics, gold foils, P-90s… I just love the clarity of single coils. My whole personal thing is high-headroom amps that don't break up easily. If I want distortion then I'll use a pedal."

N E M A S R

N E M A S T E

We notice a bombshell blue amplfier in the corner of the room that we can't quite place. "It's made by Andy Pih from Motion Custom," Marc tells us. "He used to be Kevin Shields' guitar tech and he's a genius. It's designed to be very clean and clear to my spec. It's about 22 watts, more of a hifi amp circuit in some ways. A bit like some of the old Hiwatt amps were – very pure and linear."

Marc's multitude of fascinating amplifiers doesn't end there. "I've also got this beautiful old Magnatone High Fidelity Custom 261 with a pair of Celestion creambacks in it," he says. "The tremolo is gorgeous. And this old Fender Tremolux from the mid-60s. It's had quite a life and needed recovering. It looks so much better now."

OFFSET IS BEST

Like many of his indie-rock heroes, Marc has long been drawn to Fender's offset classics. He now owns a few, both because of their unique visual and sonic identity and also their comparative affordability compared to vintage Strats and Telecasters.

Much like on old Goldtop Les Pauls, the copper in this Silvertone's paint has turned green with age

"I remember finding the really battered sunburst 1963 Fender Jaguar on eBay back in the early 2000s," he says. "It was much more affordable than other Fenders, and importantly, it just looked so cool. I had to have it."

He hands us the handsome '63 Jaguar in question. It's all stock, including the original pickups and the worn Brazilian rosewood veneer 'board and clay dot markers. It's easily one of the most vibey guitars we've played in some time but what's immediately apparent is Marc's choice of string gauge. "I string all my guitars with quite heavy strings," he explains.

ABOVE Marc owns two 1965 Supros in Wedgewood Blue: a Tremo-Lectric (left) and a Sahara

OPPOSITE TOP An Island (left) and a pair of Fidelity models, all with Mojo pickups

OPPOSITE BOTTOM For Marc, lipstick-loaded Silvertones and Danelectros are very versatile

"13-56 on nearly everything. There definitely is a greater fidelity and clarity with thicker strings that works superbly well with the single-coil pickups but, mainly, I just like the tension and feel with them. It suits the way I play."

A 1965 Fender Electric XII, an attractive 1966 non-reverse Firebird with a trio of P-90s, vintage Danelectros, a 1967 ES-330, a 1947 ES-125… the lustworthy guitars just keep coming.

"After getting my first one, I soon went out to find a few more Jags and Jazzmasters and the collection just grew from there," says Marc. "I came across this stunning blonde 1960 Jazzmaster a few years ago. It has an ash body and that's really rare, apparently. It's a beautiful weight and balance and I love the feel of the neck. The pickups are just about perfect to me, in fact that's kind of where it all started for me with making pickups. Back in the day, there weren't many options for different-sounding pickups for guitars like these. If your pickup broke or something, there were maybe a few Seymour Duncan pickups but not many options, so I'd start to make my own. You could find an original set for about £75 or something that someone had in a drawer – this was kind of pre-internet, before

all the knowledge that's easily available today. I still maintain that the best way to learn how to build and repair pickups to this day – to learn how pickups work and how they are made – is to take them apart and learn from there."

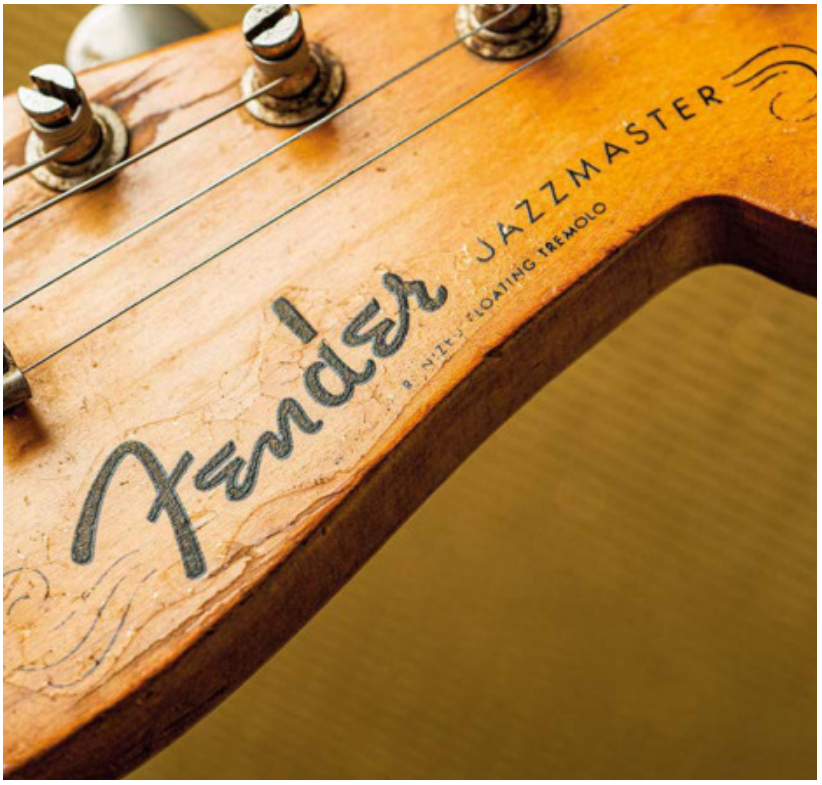
Before the *Guitar.com* inbox explodes with complaints from budding pickup winders who have ruined their original PAFs by dismantling them on their kitchen table, we should point out that much of Marc's hard-earned learning was carried out with, as he puts it, "the kind of cheap pickups you could pick up on eBay for 20 dollars or something back in the day". Think about buying some cheap test subjects before you begin your own experiments.

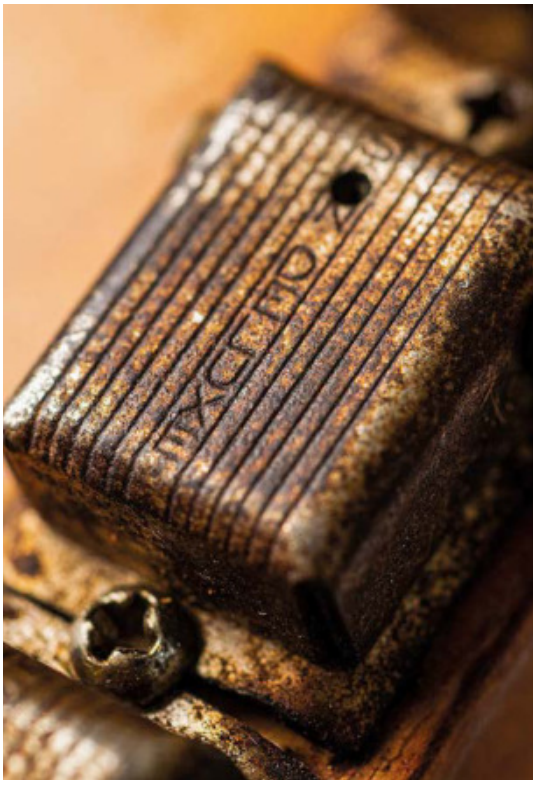
GOLDEN WONDERS

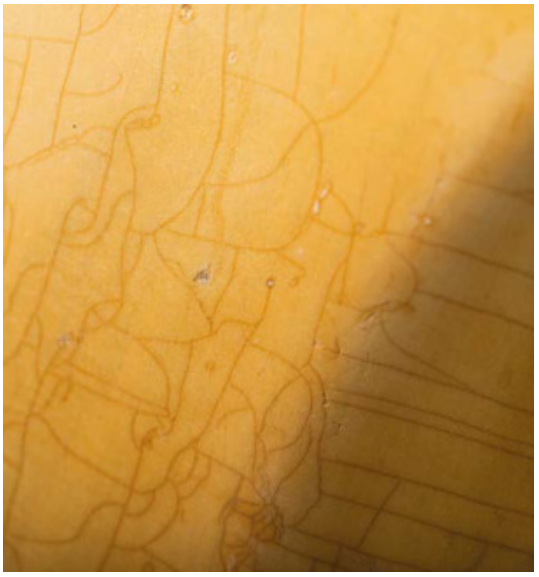
It was Marc's search for unusual sonic attributes for his own pickups that led him to those that his brand is perhaps best known for today: gold foils.

"I love the old Vistatone gold foils on vintage Supros and I love old Japanese Teisco guitars," he says. "I was always fascinated by the gold foil thing. Luckily, this was years before they became popular, so anything that came up on eBay I'd buy for a few dollars. I've got pretty much every version ever made. The interesting thing is that, although the cosmetics do change a fair bit, construction-wise, there are lots of similarities between them. It's difficult to fit them onto many guitars, so we make a range of gold foil pickups of all sizes to accommodate almost any."

Tremolux Amp
VIBRATO
Fender







Marc's blonde 1960 Jazzmaster has an ash body and what he considers to be "perfect" pickups

Marc shows us a pair of blue Supros, bought in the name of research. "The bigger one is a 1965 Tremo-Lectric but is missing the built-in tremolo. The small is a 1965 Sahara in Wedgewood Blue. Both have their original Vistatones."

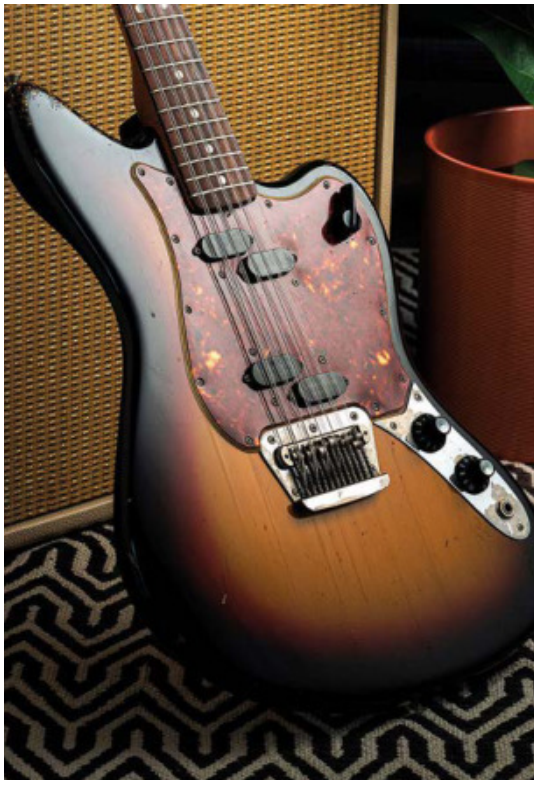
The knowledge that Marc has gleaned from years spent examining original units has proved indispensable the creation of his own designs. "I'm a bit of a purist when it comes to pickups," he says. "If the vast majority of original gold foil pickups I've tested all read at 6k, for example, then I try to make mine match that output so they are drop-in replacements. I use the same parts they used to use, rubber magnets etc, and try to get them exact. There has been a huge increase in demand for gold foils over the last few years. The clarity of a good gold foil is brilliant in lots of different guitars."

In addition to direct sales via his website, an increasing number of guitar builders use Marc's unique pickups in their creations too. "Patrick James Eggle is one of my biggest customers," says Marc. "The growth in popularity of the Coodercaster has meant that Waterslide Guitars in the USA order a lot of sets of gold foil and string-through pickups from me."

Where there are opportunities to tweak and improve original designs, Marc is happy to oblige. "We have sorted out the phase issues that plague vintage originals," he says. "We used to do them that way and people would complain they had a broken pickup or something, as they didn't understand. We've come up with a way to fix that issue and now it's much better. On a more practical note, the originals had sharp corners that would dig into your hand. We've rounded them off a bit for comfort."

Shortly before we depart, we spot some achingly chic modern builds, both built by independent luthiers just as keen to push sonic and creative boundaries as Marc is. Guess what pickups they're equipped with…

Marc's enviable collection also includes a 1967 Gibson ES-330, a 1947 Gibson ES-125 and a 1965 Fender Electric XII



The Danelectro-inspired back Galo by US luthiers Island Instruments features three prototype units that Marc is currently developing, while the Stella Rosa by UK builders Fidelity again boasts Mojo pickups. This time it's a trio of what, when pushed, Marc reveals to be his favourite-ever pickup: the Charlie Christian. "Maybe not in the guitars they originally came in," he says, "but in other guitars they sound simply amazing. And this Fidelity is such a cool design. There's always room for a few more!" **G**

Head to mojopickups.co.uk and @mojopickups on Instagram

ATB GUITARS

THE UK'S NO. 1 STOP FOR CLASSIC VINTAGE FENDER AND GIBSON GUITARS

@ATBGUITARS

- FENDER & GIBSON -

Wanted!

TOP PRICES PAID

FROM 50'S, 60'S OR 70'S

1964 FENDER STRATOCASTER

FENDER & GIBSON, ACOUSTIC, SEMI & ELECTRIC GUITARS • BASSES • AMPS • PEDALS • ACCESSORIES

CONTACT US FOR AN APPOINTMENT

T. 01242 697607
E. INFO@ATBGUITARS.COM

WWW.ATBGUITARS.COM

HEISTERCAMP · Thorpy · AIR Est. 2015 · HUDSON · BEE TRIM · TOASTER CABLES · FLOYLEY · Ivison GUITARS · DanDrive · ORIGIN EFFECTS

FUZZ WAS THE FUTURE

PART THREE: DISTORTION WAS DESTINY

Our journey through the unlikely birth of the first-ever fuzz pedal continues, as Josh Scott takes us on a quest to recreate an accident

WORDS JOSH SCOTT

In the past few articles, we delved deep into the situation and circumstance that led to what I believe is the greatest accident in guitar history – heck, maybe all of history: the birth of fuzz. Though much of what we love about guitar can be attributed to accidental discovery and the evolution of technology and ideas, this one feels different. Consider the sheer number of coincidences that had to take place in a small 1960 recording session to make it happen and you'll agree that referring to it merely as an 'accident' doesn't do it justice. 'Destiny' might be closer to the mark.

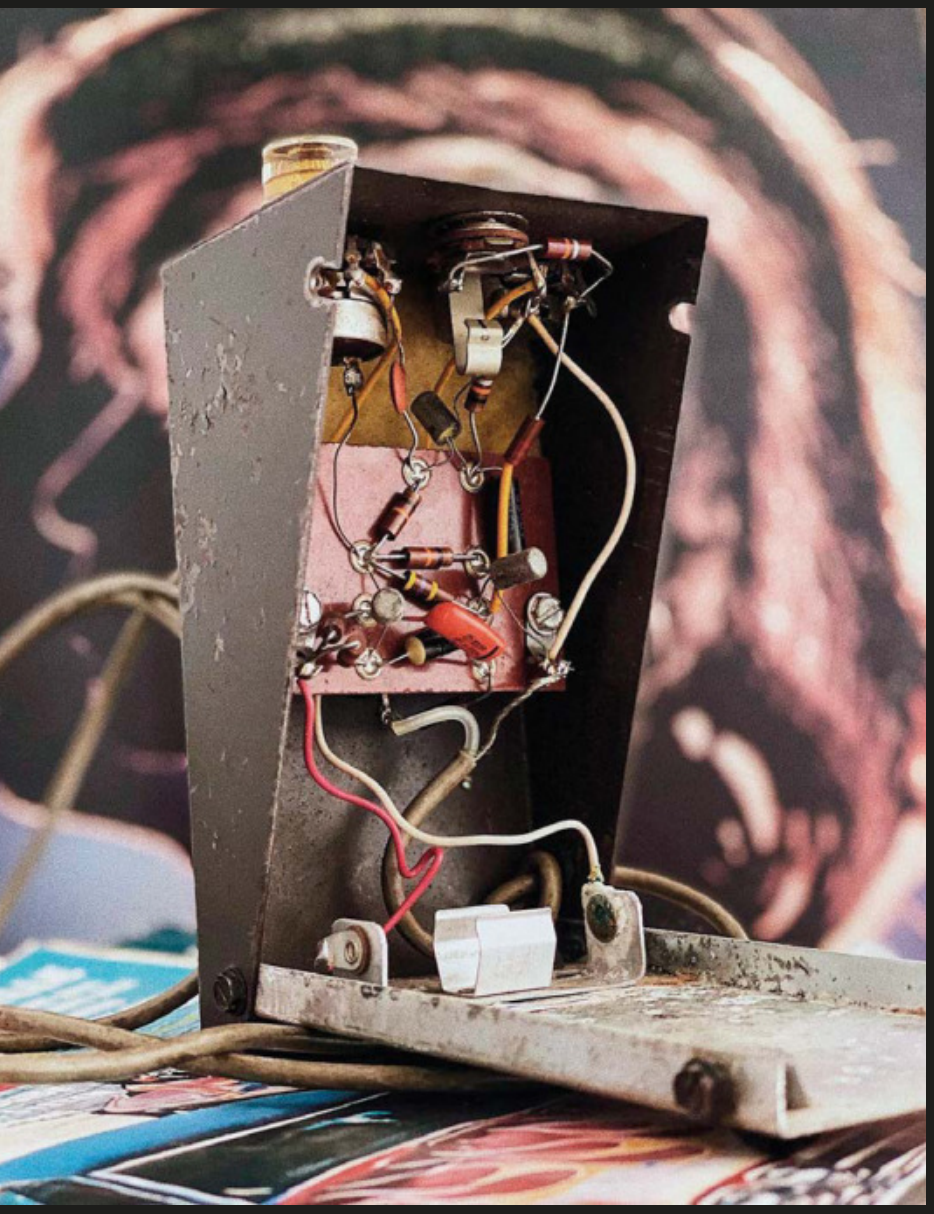
"Leave It In"

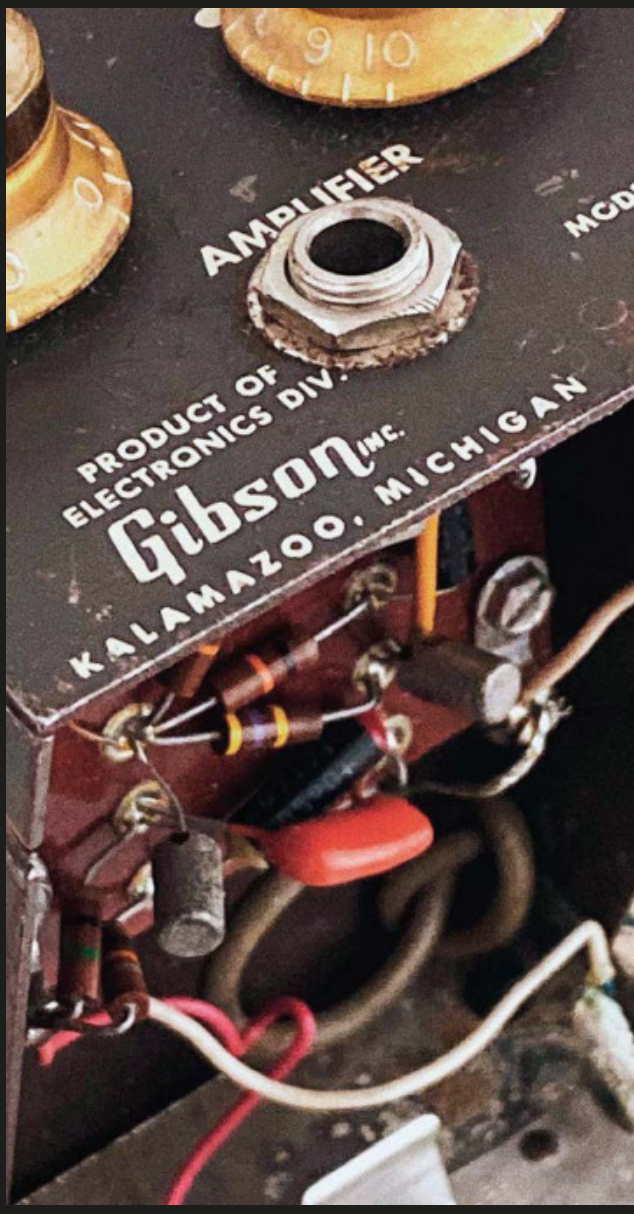
Country superstar Marty Robbins and his studio band have just wrapped up what should have been a simple recording for the song *Don't Worry*. But as they gather around the recording console and listen to the playback, they hear something weird. Not just weird but wrong. It's the kind of sound that a recording engineer from the 1950s may well have dismissed as a technical malfunction. There were rules to the recording of music – and rule number-one was that a professional recording needed to be clean and clear. Many recording studios treated their profession in an almost clinical manner. Technicians at Abbey Road Studios in London even wore white lab coats and did not allow technically untrained musicians to touch the equipment.

Back then, it was almost a case of science over sound and, if you've learnt anything during this journey into guitar's rich technical history, then you know that science ain't rock 'n' roll.

But recording engineer Glenn Snoddy and producer Don Law made a radical decision that day, one that would change the trajectory of popular music in the 1960s and beyond. They had just heard what was, by all definitions, a disastrous technical malfunction during the recording process of Grady Martin's guitar solo. Their response? "Let's leave it in." This choice broke every rule in the book; it was as gutsy as it gets. Before this moment, we'd seen small glimmers of distortion via overdriving valve amplifiers or busted speakers on tracks such as *Rumble, Rocket 88* and *How Many More Years* – but this was different. This was a leap of sonic evolution. Distorted guitar wasn't kosher on the airwaves yet, so they ran the risk of radio audiences thinking they'd accidentally released a messed-up recording – or, worse, that the engineers had heard the mistake but were too lazy to fix it. This was the musical equivalent of putting all your chips on the table with nothing but a pair of face cards in your hand. But the gamble paid off.

Soon after its release on 6 February 1961, *Don't Worry* sky-rocketed to the top of the charts, where it peaked at No.1 on the Billboard Country Hits and No.3 on the Billboard Hot 100 within a month.





The innards of a Maestro Fuzz-Tone – the world's first three-transistor fuzz circuit, designed by Revis Hobbs. Images courtesy of Robert Hart. Follow him on Instagram @lostincrystalcanyons

Airwaves across the US played this song in heavy rotation, sneakily exposing listeners to the new sound of fuzz, over and over, station after station. It was the perfect way to introduce such a questionable new guitar sound. Marty's smooth vocal, the gentle piano and the beautiful melodies kept you safe, distracted you from just how out of the ordinary Grady Martin's solo truly was. Up until this moment, the few instances of distorted guitar in popular music had pushed the boundaries, further and further with every example, and given guitarists permission to experiment. What Martin's raucous, fuzzed-out solo seemed to tell guitarists and producers was that they no longer needed permission at all; experimentation was welcome. This simple song by an unassuming country crooner, recorded in a metal shed in the backyard of a Nashville home, changed the sonic structure of guitar forever.

For guitarists, producers and engineers everywhere, this produced a wave of military-grade FOMO – the agony of hearing a sound but not being able to have it for yourself. It was the equivalent of some up-and-coming playwright hearing Shakespeare's dope-as-crap use of iambic pentameter but not being able to try this style of poetry out in their own work.

Audiences and musicians alike loved the new "fuzz tone" sound, even if Martin himself wasn't as big a fan, at least initially. Grady ended up building a whole song around the effect (*The Fuzz*, recorded with the Slewfoot Five and released in 1961) – like all good session pros, Grady Martin could see the way the wind was blowing and tacked his sail accordingly.

If It's Broke, Don't Fix It

Not long after the Billboard success of *Don't Worry*, Owen and Harold Bradley, owners of the Quonset Hut studio where the song was recorded, got a call from Nancy Sinatra. The pop superstar promptly booked an appointment to record at the Quonset Hut assuming that she'd be able to utilise the same fuzz effect that was on the Marty Robbins recording – but there was one big problem. The broken recording console that had created the effect was, well, broken. And no self-respecting studio owner of the time would keep using broken equipment. The console had been replaced.

"[Nancy] didn't like that at all," said Snoddy. "They came there to hear that sound. It was something we had no control over, because it happened in the console. Everybody was disappointed. I told Harold Bradley that I'd have to see if I could make one and get it going."

© Robert Hart

ABOVE As the world's first guitar pedal, the Fuzz-Tone would set the template for every pedal that came after it

OPPOSITE 'Guttural, mellow, raucous, tender, raw' – the Fuzz-Tone was marketed as a versatily beast indeed

I've often said there are two types of people in this world: people who talk about doing things and people who actually do them. Glenn Snoddy was the latter. He took this opportunity, developed an idea around it and did whatever it took to make it a reality. He took the sound of that broken channel inside the Quonset Huts recording console and transported it into an approachable product for guitarists worldwide, the Maestro Fuzz-Tone FZ-1.

But, like many heroes, he didn't do it alone. Glenn brought in a local radio engineer named Revis Hobbs, and these two dudes (let's call them the Captain America and Iron Man of their day) joined forces to develop the first manufactured guitar pedal in history. Don't let the weight of this reality pass you by, because without this moment, I wouldn't be sitting here writing this column – and my guess is you would probably be a trumpet player. Scary stuff.

Glenn + Revis

We've talked a lot about Glenn Snoddy so far but not much about his less well-known partner and co-inventor Revis Hobbs – let's put that right. Unlike Glenn, Revis was a quiet and understated man. He never wanted attention. As far as Revis was concerned, he had played the perfect role in the invention of the FZ-1: he got to co-invent a groundbreaking piece of technology while avoiding the spotlight. While Glenn was an ideas guy, a true salesman and a fantastic communicator, Revis was the silent-genius type. You have to understand this dynamic to understand the story at hand; the lack of clarity here is the reason this story has been misrepresented for more than half a century.

In all my research regarding the FZ-1, I only ever found first-hand stories from Glenn. In reading these interviews, you'll see Glenn taking full credit for "inventing" the Fuzz-Tone – with no mention of Revis.

Now, Glenn did not maliciously exclude his friend from the story. The problem is that "inventing" can mean different things to different people and, in Glenn's case, he had rightfully claimed credit for coming up with the idea, just not the actual circuit. Revis was the brains and, in reality, the reason that the first guitar pedal ended up more than just an idea. Because Revis never wanted to be interviewed or even to be seen for his work here, his side of this story has been all but lost. Like a true technician, as soon as he and Glenn had finished their work on the Fuzz-Tone, he'd already moved onto the next project. For him, the design was just a problem to be solved, not a trophy to display.

Ironically, Revis's humility is what almost saw him left out of the guitar pedal hall of fame. If you compare Revis with a guitar hero such as Les Paul, it's almost funny: Les would take credit for anything and everything (whether he actually did it or not) and so he's remembered as a genius. On the other hand, Revis – who most certainly was a genius – didn't toot his own horn and has been forgotten. I don't like that. If ever a man's flag deserved to be hoisted up and flown next to the greats like Gary Hurst, Keith Barr, Roger Mayer and others who reshaped guitar's very existence with the circuits they made, then Revis Hobbs is that man.

Revis was uniquely qualified to help develop the Fuzz-Tone pedal, as he'd been a technician with WSM Radio for more than five years and was the kind of guy who liked to read up on tubes and transistors in his free time. He wasn't musical but he was a wizard with electronics. See, he's basically Iron Man without the suit, right?

WSM was an AM radio station based out of Nashville. It had a morning music show called *The Waking Crew* fronted by Owen Bradley's band. Tommy Sparkman and Glenn Snoddy were the sound engineers, and Revis knew them from that association.

Robert Hobbs, Revis's son, would often tag along with his dad to the Quonset Hut. He remembered vividly how it all went down: "Dad got a call from Glenn and he said, 'Revis, we've recorded a song for Marty Robbins and it had an unusual sound in it. And it has been on the charts for several weeks now at No.1. And everybody feels like the sound has caused the song, the record, to go to the top of the charts. And I think if we could recreate that sound, that we might be able to make some money.'" Like any true hero, Revis answered the call – literally.

Reinventing an Accident

Glenn had already gambled on the success of keeping the fuzz sound in *Don't Worry* – and it had worked. So it probably wasn't difficult to convince Revis to jump onboard this next business venture. Robert (Revis's son) remembers getting in the car with his dad and driving to the Quonset Hut studio. Glenn played back the original recording for Revis. He recalled that Grady Martin was actually there recording a session when they arrived, so the whole place was already "packed full of equipment, and people smoking and a session going on".

They began working on the basic circuit design in the basement workshop of the Bradleys' home, just a few feet from the studio where the accident had occurred. Revis was the kind of guy who dreamed of circuits, components and the technical aspects of sound; he had been accidentally preparing for this moment for years. Robert remembers his dad receiving transistor data sheets in the mail and adding them into a binder of RCA transistor specs; if this doesn't scream super-nerd, I don't know what does.

Revis would drive down to Electra Distributing Company on West End in Nashville and buy the parts that he thought he might be able to use on the design. Just the transistors and basic components, though, because Revis and Glenn still didn't know exactly what the finished product would look like.

Over the next eight months, Revis and Glenn hammered out the prototype, working just as often at Revis's workshop as they did at Glenn's. When all was said and done, Revis would finish the world's first three-transistor fuzz circuit and, even more importantly, the world's first guitar pedal: the 1962 Maestro Fuzz-Tone FZ-1.

Glenn, being the salesman and outgoing guy that he was, personally drove the FZ-1 prototype to Maestro HQ in Chicago to make his pitch. The Maestro Fuzz-Tone received the official US patent number 3,213,181 and was then beautifully adorned in a brown wedge-shaped metal enclosure, with two control knobs, a cable attached to its side and a classic mid-century typeface that read 'Maestro' across its face. The FZ-1 was a giant step forward from the remote footswitches that activated the onboard tremolo and reverb of amps of the time.

Nothing like this had ever existed before, and early advertisements rightly declared it to be the first self-contained guitar pedal effect

Nothing like this had ever existed before, and early advertisements rightly declared it to be the first truly self-contained pedal effect unit for guitar. Just as early 1950s rock 'n' roll had set the stage for the coming rock invasion of the 60s, the FZ-1 was the forerunner of all guitar effects.

With a device this revolutionary, you might think that selling it would be easy. History tells a different story. Gibson had just created a product they didn't know how to sell, for people who didn't know how to use it. Unsurprisingly, this resulted in a commercial disaster. But, in typical fashion for this story, fate intervened one last time.

Three years after its release, just as this failed product's funeral was about to take place, a young guitarist named Keith Richards and his band, the Rolling Stones had an accident of their own that would turn the page of guitar providence one more time.

Tune in next month, as we wrap up this epic four-part story with the final chapter of the Fuzz-Tone's unlikely road to success. **G**

Join Josh for more effects adventures at thejhsshow.com

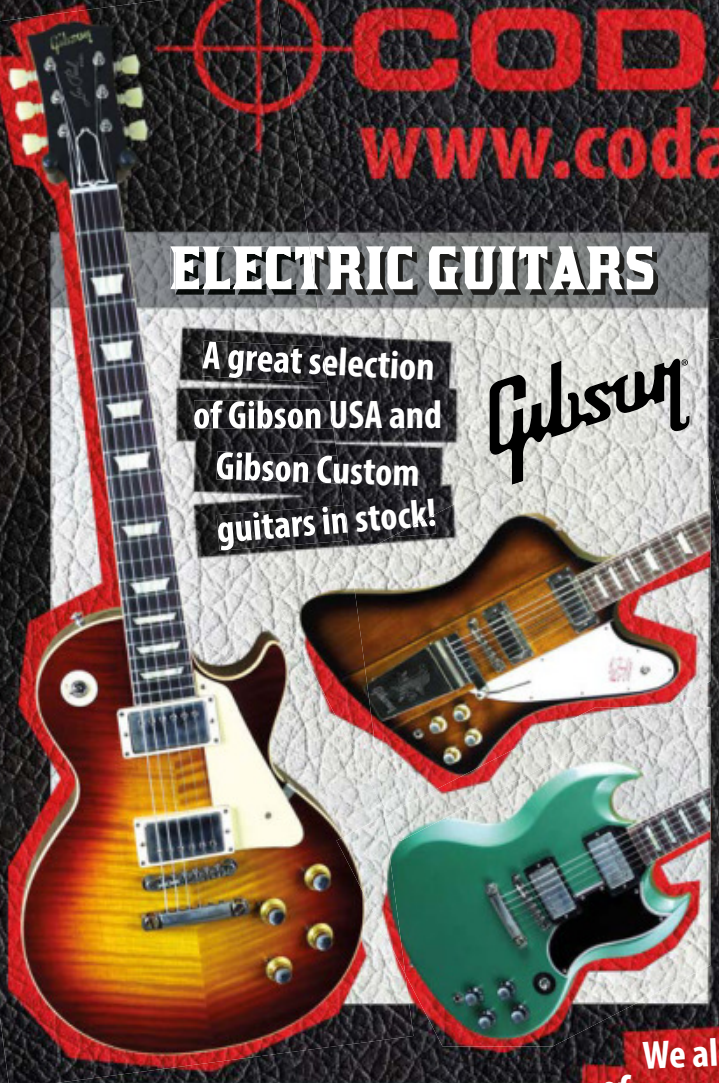
© Don Cravens / Getty Images

CODAMUSIC
www.coda-music.com

ELECTRIC GUITARS

A great selection of Gibson USA and Gibson Custom guitars in stock!

Gibson



ACOUSTIC GUITARS

The best collection of Bourgeois guitars in the country!

Bourgeois Guitars

We also stock a wide range of secondhand gear!

AMPLIFIERS

We stock, Fender, Tone King, Two Rock, Mesa/Boogie and many more. All sizes, all budgets!

EFFECTS

Every effect imaginable, Boss, MXR, Origin, Walrus plus everything else in between, all in stock!

Make sure you follow us on social media for all the latest news and updates!

@coda_music_stevenage

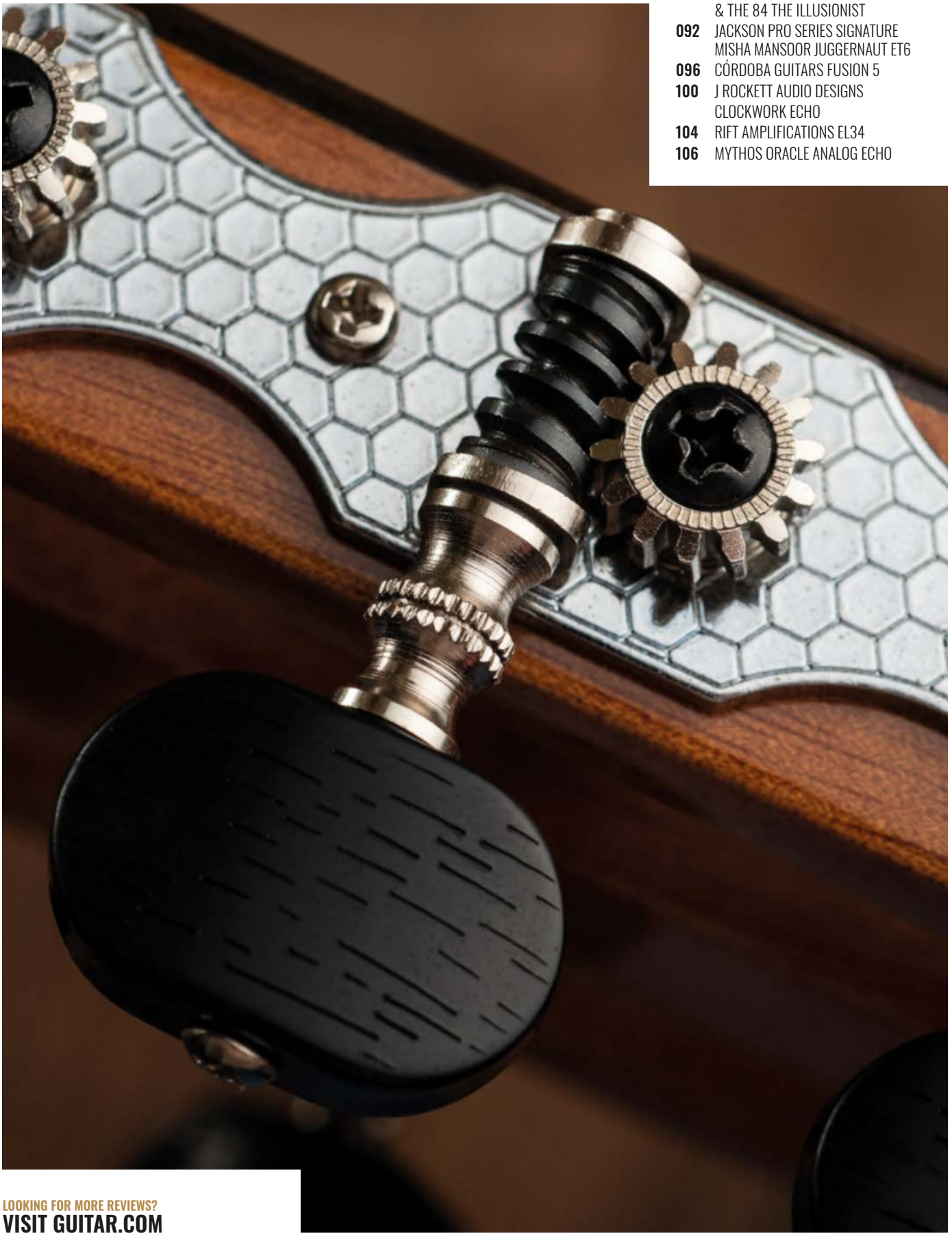
51a High Street, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3AH t : 01438 350 815 e : stevenage@coda-music.co.uk
Acoustic Centre 27b Church Lane, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3QW t: 01438 350815 e: acoustics@coda-music.com

Instant decision 9 months 0% finance
available on all new products over £300 on our website

REVIEWS

CONTENTS

072 FENDER PLAYER PLUS STRATOCASTER, STRATOCASTER HSS & NASHVILLE TELECASTER
080 EPIPHONE SLASH J-45 & VICTORIA LES PAUL STANDARD GOLDTOP
086 KRAMER CUSTOM GRAPHICS SERIES BARETTA FERAL CAT & THE 84 THE ILLUSIONIST
092 JACKSON PRO SERIES SIGNATURE MISHA MANSOOR JUGGERNAUT ET6
096 CÓRDOBA GUITARS FUSION 5
100 J ROCKETT AUDIO DESIGNS CLOCKWORK ECHO
104 RIFT AMPLIFICATIONS EL34
106 MYTHOS ORACLE ANALOG ECHO



LOOKING FOR MORE REVIEWS?
VISIT GUITAR.COM

PLAYER PLUS

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE

With features and finishes optimised for modern players, Fender's new Player Plus Series has its sights set on the social media battleground

Whether you're watching the likes stack up on Instagram or looking forward to your next pub gig, there can be little doubt that, for most real-world guitarists, Fender's Mexico-made instruments are situated firmly in the Goldilocks zone. The 'right' name on the headstock goes a long way, of course, especially when pricing is competitive and feature sets seem to get better and better with each and every new iteration. 2018 saw the most affordable Fenders in the company catalogue – the Mexico-made Standards – overhauled and rebranded as the Player Series. It's safe to say this was a success; Fender has sold more than 400,000 Player Series instruments to date. Now, in 2021, it's the turn of the Deluxe Series, reimagined here as an eye-catching new line: Player Plus.

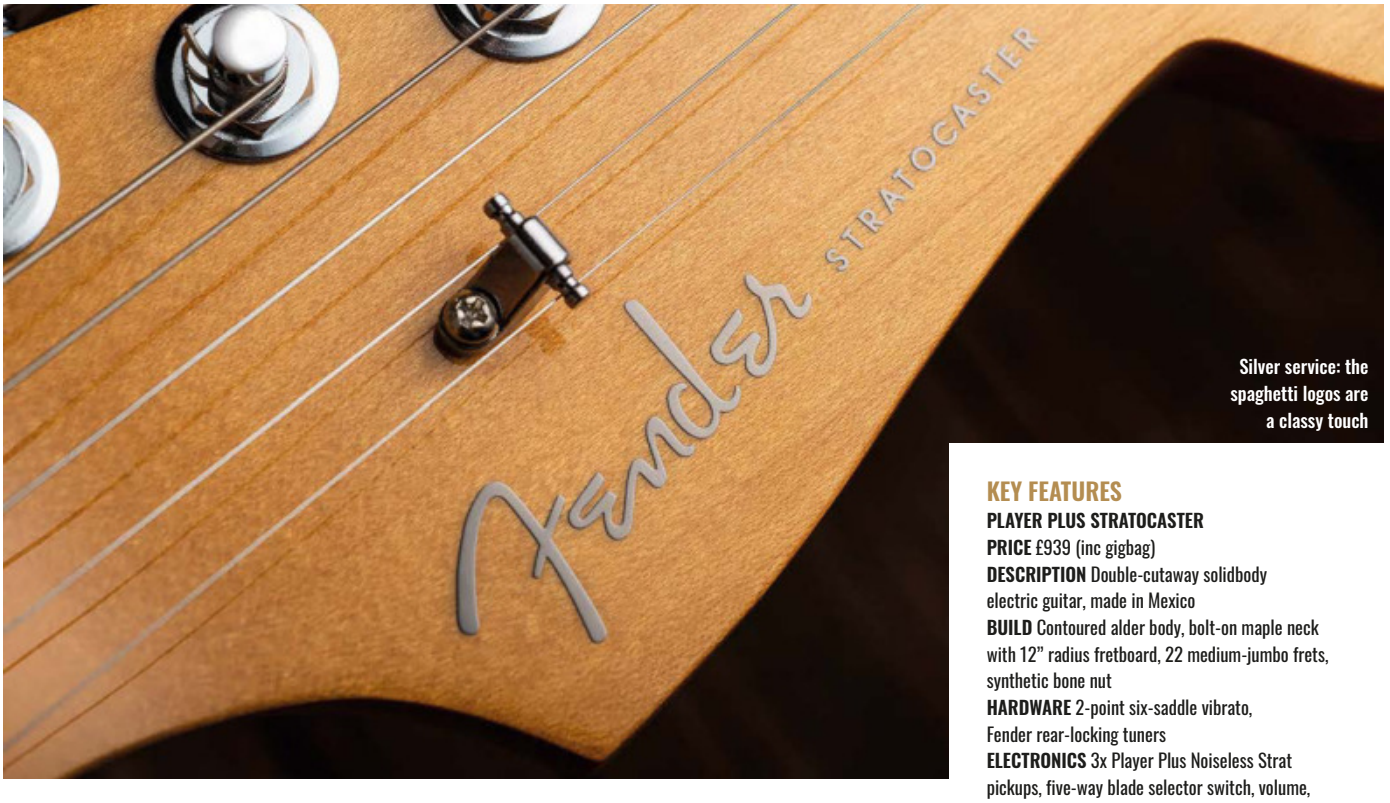
Although news of the Player Plus range was leaked by an online retailer back in July, the instruments launched officially in mid-September. Newly voiced Noiseless pickups and rolled fingerboard edges are among the headline upgrades, while the gradient finishes on offer are doubtless designed to stand out on TikTok and Instagram, where a new generation of guitarists has emerged in recent years, many of them gravitating towards the lighter and funkier textures of Fender guitars. Indeed, the launch of Player Plus also coincides with the debut of Fender's own TikTok channel, for which the brand has teamed up with boundary-pushing artists such as Hannah Dasher, Blu DeTiger, Gabriel Garzón-Montano, The Destroy Boys and Nova Twins.

Fender has been getting players noticed with bright guitar tones and vivid finishes for many decades, of course, and the smooth gradient finishes here can actually be traced back to the Dan Smith-era Stratocasters of the early 1980s. Back in the day, Fender's distinctive Stratoburst finish was even copied by now long-defunct budget brands such as Marlin. How do we know? We used to own one. Any readers who, like us, cut their teeth on secondhand Marlin Strat copies in the early 1990s have our deepest sympathies – entry-level guitars have got significantly better since then.

As showcased by the new Player Plus Stratocaster and Stratocaster HSS respectively, 2021's Tequila Sunrise and Belair Blue will certainly polarise opinion. However, traditionalists fear not; every Player Plus guitar and bass is also available in a nice, sensible Three-Colour Sunburst.

Cocktail hour: the Tequila Sunrise finish is sure to pop on social media

Two of a kind: both Strats sport a two-point, six-saddle vibrato



Silver service: the spaghetti logos are a classy touch

The Player Plus Nashville Telecaster isn't offered in a gradient finish but the Opal Spark paint job of our review model is an attractive metallic blue that has a family resemblance to Fender custom-colour finishes of the past.

So far, so glossy. But if the colours chosen for these instruments are their most striking feature, their satin urethane-finished necks are where you'll find the most welcome upgrade. One of the most subtle yet impactful things a guitar maker can do in the manufacturing process is to round over the fretboard edges for a broken-in feel, and it's great to see a feature that was formerly the preserve of boutique and high-end instruments trickle down into the mid-price market.

We're not quite talking Custom Shop finesse, of course, but sliding a finger and thumb down all three necks reveals no sharp edges and the overall feel is impressive. Indeed, we've played plenty of USA-built instruments from a variety of brands that

KEY FEATURES

PLAYER PLUS STRATOCASTER
PRICE £939 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Contoured alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 12" radius fretboard, 22 medium-jumbo frets, synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE 2-point six-saddle vibrato, Fender rear-locking tuners
ELECTRONICS 3x Player Plus Noiseless Strat pickups, five-way blade selector switch, volume, tone (middle and neck), push/pull bridge tone (adds neck pickup to positions one and two)
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.7mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.8mm at first fret, 22.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.5kg/7.7lb
LEFT-HANDERS Not yet. Left-handed Player Stratocaster is £679
FINISH Tequila Sunrise (as reviewed), Three-Colour Sunburst, Olympic Pearl, Aged Candy Apple Red, Opal Spark
CONTACT fender.com

Blue steel: the Strat HSS boasts this cool Belair Blue option

KEY FEATURES

PLAYER PLUS STRATOCASTER HSS
PRICE £979 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Double-cutaway solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Contoured alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 12" radius pau ferro fretboard, 22 medium-jumbo frets, synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE 2-point six-saddle vibrato, Fender rear-locking tuners
ELECTRONICS Player Plus humbucker (bridge) and Noiseless Strat pickups (middle and neck), five-way blade selector switch, volume, tone (middle and neck), push/pull bridge tone (coil split)
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 42.7mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.0mm at first fret, 21.7mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.7mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.7kg/8.1lb
LEFT-HANDERS Not yet
FINISH Belair Blue (as reviewed), Three-Colour Sunburst, Cosmic Jade, Silverburst

have left their respective factories in much less welcoming condition. It's especially noticeable on the Player Plus instruments with pau ferro fingerboards, the fret-ends of which seem to have been given a little more love than those of our maple 'board Strat. However, this could simply be the luck of the draw rather than indicative of a manufacturing trend.

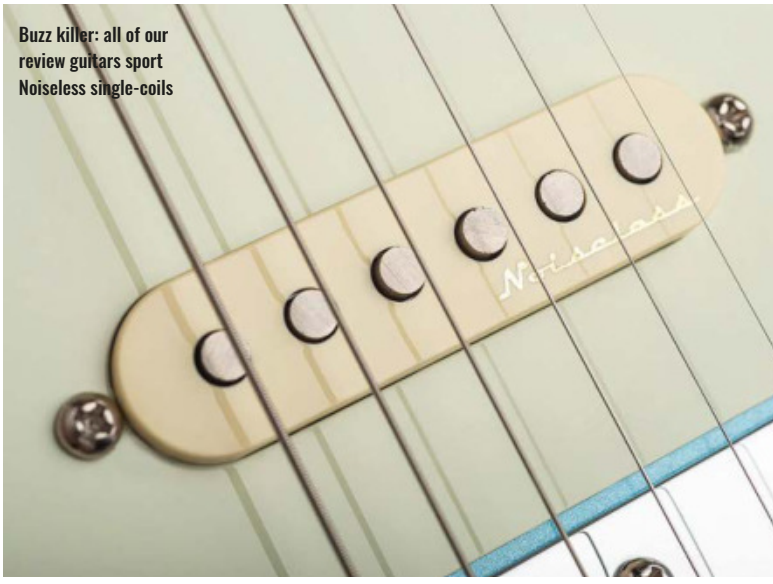
Not everyone will be smitten with the streaky light-brown appearance of the pau ferro fretboards and, on balance, we prefer the appearance of the tinted maple 'board on the Tequila Sunrise Strat. However, in the midst of a global climate emergency, it seems churlish to complain. In response to recent supply issues with rosewood and North American ash, Fender has shown that it is unafraid to pivot away from the vintage recipe on production-line guitars. When producing musical instruments on such a huge scale, it's simply a very different equation to buying wood for a small shop.

Although all of its timber comes from sustainable forestry, we feel that the Californian company could do better when it comes to how these guitars are shipped. For example, even though they are shipped in gigbags, each instrument also arrives inside an additional foam bag, which invariably tears when you remove it and has to be immediately discarded. There's also protective plastic film on the pickguard and even the backs of each of the locking tuners. Sure, it may be possible for some of this material to be recycled but a huge amount of it almost certainly ends up in landfills. And when you're talking about hundreds of thousands of units, that's a big pile of single-use plastic. It's a complex topic but the fashion industry has found ways to turn plastic waste into apparel, and it would be a hugely positive step for a market-leader in the guitar business to follow a similarly innovative path.

When it comes to the plastics fitted to the guitars themselves, the pickup covers,

Buck the trend: the HSS has a punchy humbucker at the bridge

Roll with it: the rolled fretboard edges are a welcome upgrade



Buzz killer: all of our review guitars sport Noiseless single-coils

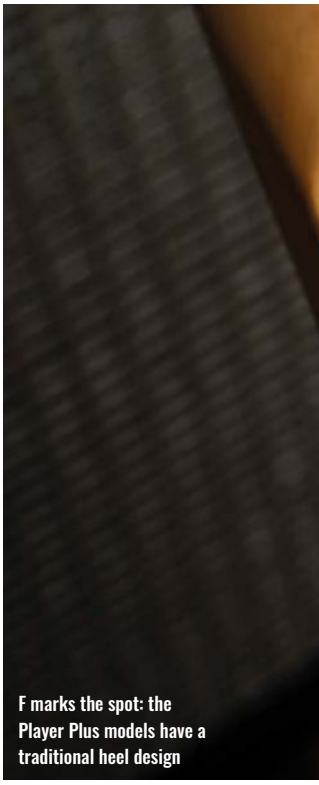
knobs and Strat switch tips here are all aged white. The HSS Strat and Nashville Tele sport three-ply mint green pickguards, while the Tequila Sunrise Strat instead wears a parchment 'guard, which gives it a cleaner and more contemporary look. The single-coil pickup covers also feature gold Noiseless logos, while the headstocks are adorned with mirror-silver spaghetti decals with a classy simplicity reminiscent of the gold equivalents on Fender's American Ultras.

In addition to five-way switching, each guitar comes with a push/pull tone pot that adds two further sounds to the mix. When engaged, on the regular Strat and the Nashville Tele this adds the neck pickup to positions one and two, while on the HSS Strat it puts the humbucker in coil-split mode. Predecessors to these models in the Deluxe Series included trick wiring in the shape of S1 switching and discreet push/push switches situated between the tone controls. Though a push/pull pot is a simpler solution that's more readily replaceable if something goes wrong down the road, traditional Stratocaster knobs can be quite tricky to grip and pull upwards at the first time of asking, especially in performance scenarios.

The most consistently successful method we found was to use our pick to lever the knob upwards from beneath it. However, if you are planning on switching tones mid-song, we recommend retrofitting a knob that's easier to grab hold of. There are no such issues when using the Telecaster's knurled metal tone control, of course, but on instruments that are claimed to have been "engineered to remove any obstacle to effortless playing", our Stratocasters' push/pull problem does seem like an oversight.

Other downsides? Fender's Deluxe gigbag looks a little tired these days and something with more comfortable shoulder straps, better internal padding and a neck support – even a larger outer pocket with room for a small pedalboard – would better suit the demographic the brand is shooting for. Some players might also lament the departure of the contoured heel design that featured on Deluxe Series models but that's very much a personal preference related to both individual playing style and hand size. We don't have any difficulties executing full-tone bends at the 22nd fret with the traditional heel arrangement – as ever, your mileage may vary.

Bright spark: the Nashville Tele looks splendid in Opal Spark


F marks the spot: the Player Plus models have a traditional heel design

Blend in: the Tele's bridge pickup has no shortage of raunch

IN USE

These three instruments vary in weight but they're consistent when it comes to player comfort; those slim C-profile necks with their softened edges really do seem to disappear in the hand. The hardware performs as well as the woodwork; both Strat whammy bars are expressive and, in combination with Fender's rear-locking tuners, we experience no tuning issues.

Much like digital modelling technology, it feels like Fender's Noiseless pickups have reached an event horizon – rather than a compromise for the sake of convenience, Noiseless pickups are now simply part of the guitar landscape. When compared to vintage-style single-coils, the pickups on these Player Plus models certainly provide an easier ride on headphones. They do the business through an old-school tube amp too; through our tweed combo, there's plenty of clarity and dynamic range without things becoming too spiky or shrill, and dedicated bridge-pickup tone controls can tame the high-end if required.

The Stratocaster has been so ubiquitous in popular music that your idea of inspiring Strat tone could just as easily be John Mayer through a Dumble as Kurt Cobain into a DS-1 – and the Telecaster's history is just as varied. All three of the instruments here feel like they offer something of a blank canvas – if you want to lean into a more vintage vibe you can but they also have the precision to work effectively at the front end of a chain of ambient effects. And the enhanced wiring just provides

Set the tone: the push/pull tone offers enhanced flexibility

more colours to paint with, whether that means getting Tele-style middle-position tones out of the regular Strat or using the HSS model's coil-split to shift between characterful humbucking grind and a wirier single-coil voice. Though bear in mind that the latter isn't noise-cancelling – the Player Plus humbucker is a more traditional design than the Noiseless single-coils.

Though it's the heaviest and the least visually striking instrument of our trio, sonically, the Nashville Telecaster might just be our pick of the bunch. There's plenty of grit and attitude from the bridge pickup, which also provides a predictably rich rhythm bed for soloing over. With its mixture of a full complement of Telecaster tones and convincing Stratocaster quack in positions two and four, it's a seriously versatile proposition.

The neck pickups of both Stratocasters deliver more sonic highlights and, with the Telecaster providing the rhythm backing in open G, there's a lot of fun to be had throwing Southern-fried Strat licks on top. Indeed, there's plenty of enjoyment to be had with these guitars, period. Aside from that tricky push/pull switching on the Stratocasters, the Player Plus Series seems primed to replicate the huge success of the Player Series by offering guitarists a high-performance experience without the lofty ticket price that usually accompanies it. *G*

KEY FEATURES

PLAYER PLUS NASHVILLE TELECASTER
PRICE £979 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION Single-cutaway solidbody electric guitar, made in Mexico
BUILD Alder body with ribcage contour, bolt-on maple neck with 12" radius pau ferro fretboard, 22 medium-jumbo frets, synthetic bone nut
HARDWARE Six-saddle string-through hardtail bridge, Fender rear-locking tuners
ELECTRONICS Player Plus Noiseless Tele (bridge and neck) and Strat (middle) pickups, five-way blade selector switch, volume, tone (middle and neck), push/pull bridge tone (adds neck pickup to positions one and two)
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.0mm at nut, 51.6mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.6mm at first fret, 21.0mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.1mm at nut, 53.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.8kg/8.5lb
LEFT-HANDERS Not yet
FINISH Opal Spark (as reviewed), Three-Colour Sunburst, Butterscotch Blonde, Aged Candy Apple Red

8/10 **A substantial but still accessible upgrade on the Player Series, Player Plus will hit the right notes for many modern guitarists**

EPIPHONE
SLASH COLLECTION J-45 & VICTORIA LES PAUL STANDARD GOLDTOP

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Gibson's Slash Collection debuted in 2020 to great fanfare. Now 2021 sees the Guns N' Roses guitarist unleashing affordable Epiphone versions on the guitar-buying public

Following the 2020 introduction of a Gibson Slash Collection featuring Les Paul electrics and J-45 acoustics in myriad colourways, Epiphone has launched a new range directly inspired by Stoke-on-Trent's greatest musical export too. Budget-conscious rockers of the world, welcome to the jungle.

Opening the matching black Epiphone cases, both adorned with Slash's skull logo, we're greeted by two cheerful instruments.

Pro tip: Custom ProBucker pickups provide classic LP snarl

KEY FEATURES

SLASH VICTORIA LES PAUL STANDARD GOLDTOP
PRICE £799 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string electric solidbody guitar, made in China
BUILD Mahogany body with carved maple cap, glued-in mahogany neck with Slash Custom C carve, cream binding, Indian laurel fretboard with 12" radius and pearloid inlays, 22 medium jumbo frets, Graph Tech nut
HARDWARE Nickel LockTone tune-o-matic bridge and stopbar tailpiece, Epiphone vintage deluxe tuners, strap locks
ELECTRONICS Epiphone Custom ProBucker pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone, CTS potentiometers, Orange Drop capacitors, 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.6mm
NECK WIDTH 43mm at nut, 53.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.5mm at first fret, 26mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 35.9mm at nut, 51.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.75kg/8.3lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Gold gloss polyurethane
CONTACT epiphone.com

From the nut down, both look pretty much identical to the Gibson Slash Core Collection guitars that we reviewed when they first hit the UK early in 2020. The headstocks do give the game away but the redesigned Epiphone Kalamazoo headstock does lend an air of gravitas and elegance to the brand's latest models, which the previous version never quite achieved.

In the electric corner, we have Victoria, an attractive Chinese-made Goldtop tribute to one of Slash's beloved Les Pauls, complete with seriously rock-ready uncovered pickups.

The acoustic corner is occupied by an Indonesian-made slope-shoulder J-45 with a deep red Vermillion Burst finish for those more sensitive *GN'R Lies*-style moments. The acoustic is also available in the more traditional two-tone November Burst, while the Epiphone Slash Les Paul Standard is to all intents and purposes the same as our Goldtop review model only with a flame maple veneer that's visible through the Anaconda, Vermillion, November and Appetite Burst finishes.

We kick things off with Victoria. In an unorthodox move, Slash named his original Goldtop, upon which this guitar is based, after the woman responsible for the theft of several of his instruments. While most of the guitars eventually returned home, that Goldtop remains out there, presumably still with its fleet-fingered namesake. Victoria's secret indeed.

This is a good-looking Les Paul and, at first glance, there's not much to differentiate this instrument from its Gibson sibling. Yes, the shiny reflections on the gloss polyurethane finish are a giveaway, there are some slightly inaccurate areas of colour application and the gold lacks the depth of a nitrocellulose finish, but it still looks a lot more serious than the price tag suggests, and the Kluson-style tuners and nickel-plated hardware add gravitas too.

The body weight is reassuring and the neck – carved to the same specifications as Slash's Gibson models – has a beautifully full, chunky profile. The laurel fingerboard, an increasingly popular alternative to rosewood on budget instruments, certainly looks the part too.

Speaking of chunky, the C-shaped neck on the J-45 is something of a beast. It's by no means unmanageable but still quite a handful – just like that of the Gibson Slash J-45, in fact. Thick, solid necks are often welcome on acoustic guitars, as they can prevent energy loss and, as this guitar features all-solid wood construction, this bodes well. As you might expect, the Epiphone Slash J-45 also comes stage-ready thanks to its LR Baggs VTC active pickup system.

IN USE

Plugging Victoria into a warmed-up Cornford Hurricane with just a wah pedal between axe and amp, we're given an immediate shot of authentic-sounding rock 'n' roll snarl. With Epiphone's Custom ProBuckers installed – slightly overwound and hot, and exclusive to this series – the bridge unit delivers a tremendous take on that raucous, nasal Les Paul sound. Victoria loves tube-amp dirt too, with powerchords coming through all chewy and forthright.

Top man: Victoria's finish is modelled after his Gibson Goldtop of the same name

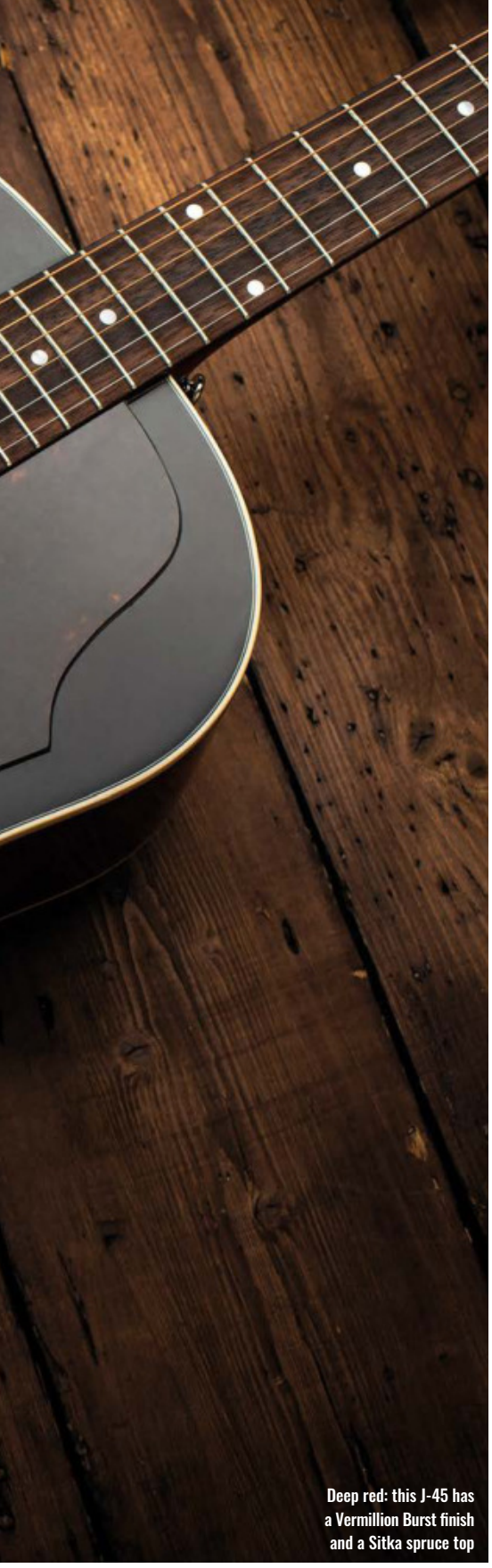
KEY FEATURES

SLASH J-45
PRICE £799 (inc hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string electro-acoustic guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Solid Sitka spruce soundboard, solid mahogany back and sides, mahogany neck with 16" radius Indian laurel fretboard and 20 medium jumbo frets, Graph Tech Tusq nut and saddle, ivoroid bridge pins
HARDWARE Grover Rotomatic tuners
ELECTRONICS LR Baggs VTC undersaddle pickup and preamp with soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.6mm
NECK WIDTH 1.69mm at nut, 54.4mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 24.9mm at first fret, 26.5 mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 36.1mm at nut, 54.5mm at bridge
WEIGHT 2.45kg/5.4lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Vermillion Burst gloss polyurethane (as reviewed), November Burst

The Goldtop lends a grippy feel to single notes and doublestops too, ideal for those huge, flamboyant pentatonic solos. If you're looking to emulate Slash's playing as well as his guitar choice, you'll be happy to hear that the big bends and wide vibrato typical of the man himself are easy to access here.

The middle position is often something of an afterthought for Les Paul-minded rockers but, in this case, we're able to dial in some very serviceable sounds – and that's before we explore the joys of blending with the twin tone and volume controls. The Epi's response here may not be as detailed and immediate as that of the Gibson models but it boasts some genuinely inspiring timbres, which encourage us to play expressively and experiment with hand positions and attacks.

The neck pickup is a real beauty. Smooth, round and jazzy, it doesn't do the flute-like clarity of a 1950s Goldtop but it remains articulate and musical as we dial up the gain. Just for fun, we pull back into clean territory and the results are impressive,



Deep red: this J-45 has a Vermillion Burst finish and a Sitka spruce top

Whole grain: the J-45 sports solid mahogany back and sides

Get ahead: both models boast the redesigned Kalamazoo headstock

especially when we drop the pick and get stuck in with fingers only for some Wes Montgomery-style octaves.

Victoria settled, it's time to get heartfelt with the J-45, which is simply begging for some massive chords played with a medium pick. Unplugged, the guitar responds better to strumming than to fingerstyle, sporting a focused and mid-heavy fundamental voice courtesy of the mahogany back and sides. The J-45 is a classic design that responds well to digging in and this is no exception.

Dropping the guitar into alternate tunings is a pain-free too, thanks to the well-cut nut and Grover Rotomatic tuners.

VTC stands for Volume, Tone and Compression and plugging the Baggs pickup system into a Fishman SoloAmp with a touch of reverb, we get good results from the start. There's still a touch of piezo front-end but the chances are that these guitars will see most action within a band where those slightly spiky transients will help it cut through the mix.

Regardless of the strength of your ardour for Slash's back catalogue, both of these instruments work well on their own merits. If you're a Slash fanatic, then the decal signatures on the truss-rod covers will likely mean a lot to you. If not, you can swap them out for something traditional. The same, however, does not apply to the gold Skully logo that graces the back of the headstock. But you shouldn't let that put you off. These are great guitars regardless of decor. ***G***

8/10 **You don't need to be a Slash fan to appreciate a rocking Les Paul at a good price, and its acoustic stablemate comes equally well primed for the stage**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vintage V100AFD Reissued **£499**
Gibson Les Paul Special Tribute Humbucker **£899**
ESP LTD EC-1000 **£1,173**

Sigma JM-SG45 **£575**
Guild DS-240 Memoir **£576**
Eastman E10SS **£1,279**

KRAMER
CUSTOM GRAPHICS SERIES BARETTA FERAL CAT & THE 84 THE ILLUSIONIST

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

With the 1980s very much in vogue, Kramer's new Custom Graphics series is a flamboyant reminder of what the bold brand stands for

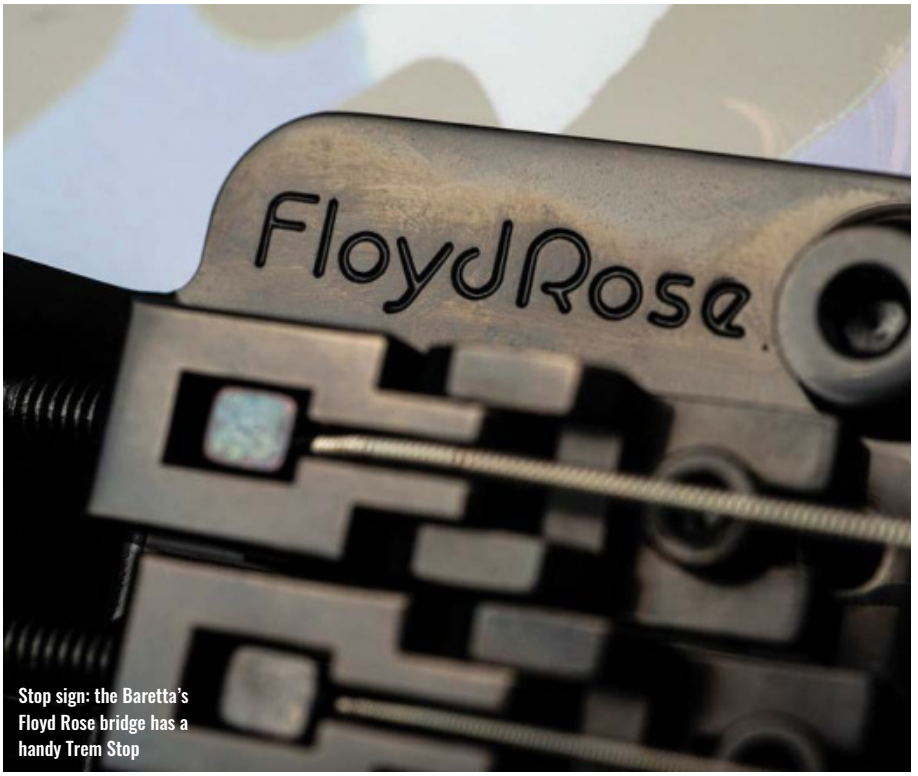
Seymour Duncan

Cat's pyjamas: the Feral Cat wears a Seymour Duncan JB 'bucker

Though it began by building aluminium-necked instruments in the mid-1970s, Kramer's move to wooden-necked guitars with hotrod stylings in the 1980s would prove lucrative. By the end of the decade, thanks in no small part to its association with the likes of Richie Sambora and Eddie Van Halen, Kramer was producing some of the most coveted guitars on the planet. However, the original Kramer company would soon be dead – even before grunge had the chance to kill it off.

Mounting debts, excessive spending and a lawsuit from Floyd Rose saw the company fold in January 1991. Gibson acquired the brand later in the 1990s and, today, the Nashville company's new management seems to be throwing its weight behind Kramer's revival like never before.

Skinny trip: both guitars feature slim, sleek neck profiles



Stop sign: the Baretta's Floyd Rose bridge has a handy Trem Stop

KEY FEATURES

BARETTA FERAL CAT
PRICE £899 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on maple neck with 12.6" radius maple fretboard, 22 jumbo frets
HARDWARE Black Kramer mini die-cast tuners, Floyd Rose 1000 Series vibrato bridge with LRT-L40 Trem Stop and EVH D-Tuna, locking nut
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan JB humbucker, master volume with push/pull series/parallel switching
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.9mm at nut, 52.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.7mm at 1st fret, 23.0mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 53.85mm at bridge, 35.55mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.7kg/8.16lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Rainbow Leopard (as reviewed), Snakeskin Green Blue Fade, White Lotus Candy Blue, Warning Tape on White Red, Blue Sparkle with Flames
CONTACT kramerguitars.com

Both of our review models are from Kramer's new Custom Graphics Collection. According to Gibson brands product manager Aljon Go, this series is a celebration of something that's part of the Kramer DNA. "Kramers with wild finishes were some of the most fondly remembered guitars of that era," he says. "We partnered up with some artists that have done Kramer graphics in the past and new artists, and collaborated with them to bring some of the energy and nostalgia and reintroduce it to a whole new generation of fans."

The range consists of six graphic finishes, with five variations available on the Baretta model and just one finish option on the 84. The 84 honours what Kramer considers its golden age and is an homage to the 5150 guitar that Van Halen played during his association with the company.

The 84's sole Seymour Duncan JB pickup is direct-mounted and surrounded by a hypnotic swirl finish appropriately titled the Illusionist. The neck is one-piece maple and sports the original non-angled 'banana' hockey-stick-style headstock found on Eddie's original Kramer.

Seen here in a positively demure Rainbow Leopard finish, the Baretta is probably the most famous of Kramer's creations and the model was the original mass-produced result of the company's collaboration with EVH. Here, we have a three-piece maple neck, with additional sections employed for the fingerboard and the tip of the headstock, which this time is back-angled.

Despite constructional differences, these alder-bodied instruments feel remarkably similar, aside from the slightly flatter radius of the Baretta's 'board (12.6 inches to the 84's 12 inches) and its slanted, ring-mounted Seymour Duncan JB. The slim C neck carves feel almost identical and it's a predictably sleek and fast profile with only the thinnest of satin finishes. We wish the fingerboard edges had a more generous roll but at this price such omissions are not entirely unexpected.

Guitars such as these would, of course, be incomplete without a locking vibrato system. Both come equipped with Floyd Rose units complete with Trem Stops and EVH's patented D-Tuna.

IN USE

With their eye-popping finishes and 1980s hard rock pedigree in spades, upon plugging in, we inevitably gravitate towards the higher-gain profiles on our Kemper Profiler. Both guitars are almost indistinguishable sonically but deliver the benchmark for raunchy rock guitar tone: grunt, power, definition and clarity.

Palm-muted powerchords ring out thunderously well and single-note riffs punch through with a perfectly rounded voicing. If you want more snap and less gain, pulling up the push/pull volume control on either guitar sees it switch to parallel wiring. Okay, there aren't many other tones to talk about here but there are plenty of examples of superlative rock players augmenting their palettes with careful manipulation of their volume control. However, the 500k volume pots on both guitars have with a very steep taper, so don't expect much in the way of roll-off or clean-up.

Head master: the guitars feature different eras of headstock logo

KEY FEATURES

THE 84 THE ILLUSIONIST
PRICE £899 (inc gigbag)
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Alder body, bolt-on one-piece maple neck with 12" radius fretboard, 22 jumbo frets
HARDWARE Chrome-plated Kramer mini die-cast tuners, Floyd Rose 1000 Series vibrato bridge with LRT-L40 Trem Stop and EVH D-Tuna, locking nut
ELECTRONICS Seymour Duncan JB humbucker, master volume with push/pull series/parallel switching
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 41.9mm at nut, 52.3mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.1mm at 1st fret, 22.9mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 54.4mm at bridge, 35.5mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.5kg/7.72lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES 3D Black/White Swirl only

Stay tuned: the Baretta and the 84 boast the patented EVH D-Tuna

This might sound like a negative but, if you'd like more light and shade, rest assured that swapping out a potentiometer is at least a very easy modification to make. In truth, this limitation doesn't diminish our playing experience, and the sheer simplicity encourages us to keep the overdrive engaged. Besides, if you are walking out on stage with either of these instruments, nobody in the audience will expect any great degree of subtlety anyway.

Whether single-pickup guitars behave any differently to those with neck pickups thanks to less magnetic pull on the strings is an oft-debated topic. However, when plugging in either of these guitars, there's little doubt that they are two of the best-sounding and most immediate rock guitars we've ever played. Coincidence? We'd say not.

The 1980s are back with a vengeance, then. That might be a frightening prospect for those who grew up in that era but there was certainly a sense of fun then – embodied here in the striking finishes of the Custom Graphics series – that was perhaps absent in mainstream rock during the subsequent decades. If you are too young to remember these guitars the first time around, we heartily recommend auditioning one to find out what all the fuss is about. *G*

8/10 **Unadulterated 1980s rock machines that, in the best possible way, sound even more outrageous than they look**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

EVH 5150 Series Standard **£749**
Charvel Limited Edition Super Stock Model 2 **£999**
Schecter Sun Valley Super Shredder FRS **£899**

OUR GENERATION

Tom Ford plays **Top Tape** flatwound electric guitar strings:
in production and used on era-defining records since 1961

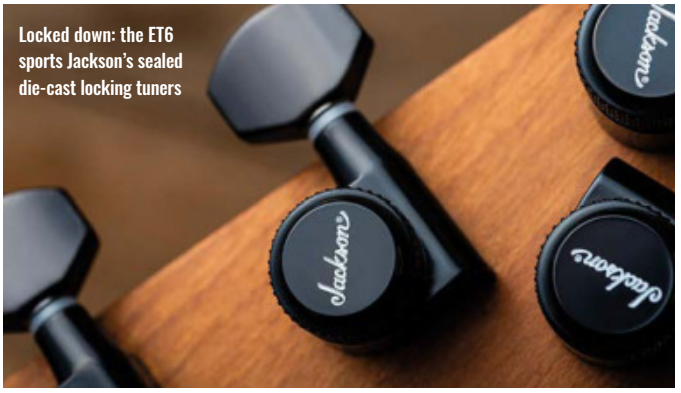
ROTOSOUND®

@rotosound_uk

Jackson
EVERTUNE

Ever ready: the ET6's EverTune bridge should keep you in tune

Flat out: the über-flat caramelised fretboard has rolled edges



Locked down: the ET6 sports Jackson's sealed die-cast locking tuners

JACKSON
PRO SERIES SIGNATURE MISHA MANSOOR JUGGERNAUT ET6

WORDS DARRAN CHARLES

Jackson's partnership with a progressive metal hero yields another Juggernaut – and this one promises to remain in tune come rain or shine

Periphery guitarist Misha Mansoor's association with Jackson continues to build momentum. The release of the EverTune-equipped ET6 and the ET7 seven-string makes a total of 11 variations on the Juggernaut in the Jackson catalogue, the Pro Series representing a more affordable Indonesian-made alternative to the USA models.

The Juggernaut is a sleek and rather futuristic design, with its slim body and upper and lower horns crafted to provide easy upper-fret access. The body has been sculpted and contoured with ergonomics in mind and it proves a very comfortable ride when strapped on, while its basswood construction is in common with most Juggernaut models in the Pro Series.

There's also a graphite-reinforced caramelised maple bolt-on neck with a scarf-joint for the angled headstock, as well as an oiled finish. Like fellow prog-metal icon John Petrucci, Misha has chosen an ultra-flat 20-inch radius for his signature model's 'board.

Thanks to the not-insubstantial weight and real estate occupied by the EverTune bridge, the fact that the Juggernaut ET6 is able to balance perfectly when strapped on is remarkable. EverTune is a mechanical bridge design that uses a spring and lever for each string to keep it in tune – it's like a tension-based pitch-regulation system, if you will. Setting it up involves rotating the tuner until you reach 'zone two', the point at which pitch no longer increases. At this stage, fine-tuning is carried out at the bridge end using a hex key, *et voila* – the string should remain perfectly in tune for the rest of its days.

Job done? Almost. In order for the bridge to react to string stretching and keep things in tune, we must first return to the peghead and locate the sweet spot between zones two and three (zone three being the point at which the tuner increases the pitch and the string reacts to stretching).

Following these steps proves straightforward enough but locating that sweet spot can be time consuming. However, once successfully negotiated, the intonation improvement is noticeable and higher-register chords sound more accurate than they do on our guitars equipped with conventional bridges.

Coiled spring: the MM1 pickups make for maximum flexibility

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,349
DESCRIPTION 6-string double-cutaway electric guitar, made in Indonesia
BUILD Basswood body, bolt-on caramelised maple neck with 20" fingerboard radius, glow-in-the-dark side dots, 24 jumbo frets
HARDWARE Jackson sealed die-cast locking machineheads, EverTune F6 bridge
ELECTRONICS 2x Jackson Uncovered MM1 humbuckers, volume, push/pull tone, 5-way blade pickup selector (full bridge pickup, two inner coils, both pickups in full humbucking mode, two outer coils, full neck pickup)
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.33mm at nut, 52.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20.84mm at 1st fret, 21.72mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 51.22mm at bridge, 35.91mm at nut
WEIGHT 3.5kg/7.72lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISHES Chalk Grey
CONTACT jacksonguitars.com

Chalk lines: the Chalk Grey finish looks great all the way to the tip

IN USE

The neck profile feels like a slim D in our hands and its girth remains consistent from nut to join. Super-flat fretboards can prove rather clinical and unforgiving for chordal work but the lightly rolled fretboard edges here lend the neck a more approachable feel.

Sizzling hot pickups aren't strictly necessary to produce heavy tones and that fact has not been lost on Misha and Jackson. The Juggernaut's co-designed Jackson MM1 medium-high-output pickups allow us to dial in gain without having it foisted upon us, and the even frequency response from the basswood body and snappy caramelised 'board unite harmoniously to ensure that lower-register riffs slice through the mix.

Just like Periphery's musical output, this guitar is no one-trick pony. Additional tonal options in the form of inner and outer single-coil combinations in positions two and four provide considerable sparkle when playing through a cleaner amp setting, while the push/pull tone control stays out of the circuit entirely until the pot is put in the up position.

There are many brands vying for the attention (and cash) of prog-metal guitarists. But Misha's longevity and influence on the world of contemporary guitar is built on a deep understanding of what the modern player requires from an instrument. This knowledge has been distilled into another strong signature model that possesses all the tonal and playability requirements to thrive in its destined musical environment. *G*

8/10 **A worthy addition to the Juggernaut range and a godsend for guitarists who tour without a tech to tune their guitars**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Solar Guitars S1.6PB **£1,229**
Ibanez Axion Label RGD61ALET **£1,219**
Schecter Banshee Mach-6 **£1,779**

INTRODUCING THE NEW
META SERIES
MBM-1
Manson x Cort
Guitar.com
EDITOR'S CHOICE
cortguitars.com/mbm-1
mansonguitarworks.com
440distribution.com

CÓRDOBA GUITARS
FUSION 5

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Can this affordable crossover model tempt steel-string players towards the nylon side?

The evocative voice of nylon-string guitars has tempted many players from the pop, folk and jazz worlds to explore these instruments. However, because of the wide necks and high actions typical of guitars built for classical playing, first contact can be something of a shock to nylon neophytes. The answer, for many, is a hybrid, a 'crossover' guitar designed to make the nylon experience much more accessible. One such example is this Fusion 5 model, described by its creator, California-based Córdoba Guitars, as the ideal instrument with which to transition from steel-string to nylon-string.

There are several indicators that we are dealing with a modern nylon hybrid here. The cutaway and soundhole-mounted Fishman Sonitone controls are a dead giveaway. Less immediately obvious is the slightly slimmer (but still broad by steel-string standards) 48mm nut width, along with the 16-inch fretboard radius and the side position markers. Classical players may prefer their frets undelineated but the side dots are a godsend for those of us used to getting their bearings from them. The Fusion also features a fan-braced solid spruce top with laminated mahogany back and sides and a three-piece neck crowned with a pau ferro fretboard. That visual theme continues in the pau ferro bridge, pau ferro headstock veneer and composite binding, giving the guitar a unified if slightly spartan look.

Understated flourishes come in the form of Córdoba's simple headstock logo in pearloid – inspired by the arches of the Mezquita mosque-cathedral in Córdoba in southern Spain – and an attractive pearloid rosette.

IN USE

With its light weight, good balance and upper-fret access, the Fusion 5 is a comfortable instrument on the lap. It's also remarkably loud and lively acoustically, the fan-braced solid top giving it a fast response while the mahogany back and sides imbue each note with a strong, dry fundamental character more typical of the cutting sound of a flamenco instrument.

The setup is friendly, with a low action that shouldn't feel excessively alien to steel-string players, even if there's scope for some further fret polishing and fretboard buffing here. While classical players predominantly use sideways vibrato, many players coming to this instrument from a more contemporary playing background might find that their

Modern touch: the pearloid rosette is a concession to style

Nuclear fusion: the Fusion 5 is designed to appeal to steel-string players

Arch look: the logo was inspired by a historic building in Córdoba, Spain

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £372
DESCRIPTION 6-string electro-acoustic single-cutaway nylon-string guitar, made in China
BUILD Fan-braced solid spruce top, laminated mahogany back and sides, three-piece mahogany neck with dovetail joint, pau ferro fingerboard with 16" radius, bone nut, pau ferro bridge with bone saddle, 19 medium-small frets
HARDWARE Córdoba 14:1 tuners with black ebonoid buttons
ELECTRONICS Fishman Sonitone Nylon Guitar System with combined 9v battery box and jack socket and soundhole-mounted volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 25.6"/650mm
NECK WIDTH 48mm at nut, 58.5mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21mm at first fret, 24mm at 9th fret
STRING SPACING 38.9mm at nut, 59.7mm at bridge
WEIGHT 1.6kg/3.5lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Natural gloss polyurethane (as reviewed), Jet Black (£441), Sonata Burst (£441)
CONTACT cordobaguitars.com

Spruce up: the solid fan-braced spruce top ensures a fast response

wider up-and-down vibrato technique results in more than a few extraneous noises.

If you're not careful, this is exacerbated somewhat by the choice of pickup system. Undersaddle pickups can be notoriously tricky on nylon-string instruments. In this case, you may find yourself reaching for the tone control to tame the slightly synthetic crunch to the initial transient of each note – additional equalisation from an acoustic preamp or effects processor offers greater control and helps sweeten the tone.

Though the competition from Yamaha's NCX and NTX instruments is fierce, if you're looking for a comfortable nylon-string electro at an entry-level price with which to unleash your inner José González, Jason Mraz or even Leonard Cohen, then you could certainly do worse than the Fusion 5. And the Jet Black and sunburst alternatives are good-looking choices for stage use. However, you'll have to budget for strap buttons to be fitted as they don't come as standard. *G*

8/10 **A comfortable squeeze that will cut through the mix both unplugged and via an acoustic amp or PA system**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Yamaha NTX1 **£329**
Takamine GC3CE **£357**
Auden York **£1,099**

CODAMUSIC www.coda-music.com

Fano Omnis now in stock

51a High Street, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3AH t: 01438 350 815 e: stevenage@coda-music.co.uk
Acoustic Centre 27b Church Lane, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3QW t: 01438 350815 e: acoustics@coda-music.com

Instant decision 9 months 0% finance
available on all new products over £300 on our website

L-OUT
J. ROCKETT AUDIO DESIGNS
9VDC
SPEED
DEPTH
CLOCKWORK
(((ECHO)))
MODULATION
ON/OFF

Rockett science: this pedal is modelled on the Memory Man

J ROCKETT AUDIO DESIGNS
CLOCKWORK ECHO

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Created with input from the designer of the world's best-loved delay pedal, J Rockett's first Vintage Series device wants to help you make some new memories, man

You don't hear much about the people who designed the classic effects of the 1970s and 80s – the stompbox-nerd-as-celebrity notion only really took hold in the past few decades. But Howard Davis, designer of the Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man, is one such backroom pioneer you might have heard of. This is his latest project.

Designed 'in conjunction with' Davis, the Clockwork Echo is the first pedal in J Rockett's new Vintage Series. Its stated aim? To capture the sound of that legendary bucket-brigade delay but bring it up to date with contemporary convenience and functionality.

What does that mean? For a start, it means that the Clockwork runs off standard 9V power rather than a Memory Man's 24V brick. The modulation of the repeats can be switched on and off with a stomp, while a third footswitch is used for tap tempo (up to 600ms). There are two expression pedal inputs: one for controlling delay time, one for repeats. If you have a pair you can use both at once, though you may need a third leg.

The second output flips the delay's phase for a bit of stereo spread. But there's another interesting addition: a level knob for boosting the dry signal. Given that it remains engaged even when the unit is in bypass, you might well describe it as an adjustable buffer.

Mod cons: modulation your repeats with the Clockwork's controls

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £399
DESCRIPTION Stereo analogue delay pedal with modulation, made in the USA
CONTROLS Delay mix, time and repeats, modulation speed and depth, output level (engaged even in bypass); bypass, modulation and tap tempo footswitches
FEATURES Mono and stereo outputs, expression pedal inputs for time and repeats; buffered bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 134 x 124 x 55mm
CONTACT face.be, rockettpedals.com

Tap dance: the Clockwork offers up to 600ms of tap tempo

All of this functionality comes in a relatively small but weighty enclosure, with cog-themed artwork across the control surface that looks very smart but doesn't exactly help with clarity.

IN USE

Even if you've never used a Deluxe Memory Man before, you've surely come across some of its many descendants. It very quickly becomes clear that the Clockwork goes right back to the source – and that Mr Davis, who last surfaced in collaborations with Pigtronix and Xvive, has lost none of his trademark touch.

Basically it sounds like a Memory Man – uncannily so, in fact. The first few repeats are clean enough, just a little softer-edged than a hard digital attack, and it's only after a good six or seven times around that things really start breaking up. They do so in classically murky style, accompanied by a noticeable surge in background hiss that's one facet of the original that we wouldn't have been sorry to lose.

The modulation has independent controls for rate and depth but you're not likely to be twiddling these much: once you hit that sweeter-than-sweet wobble with both knobs close to noon, especially with a stereo rig, you won't want to change a thing.

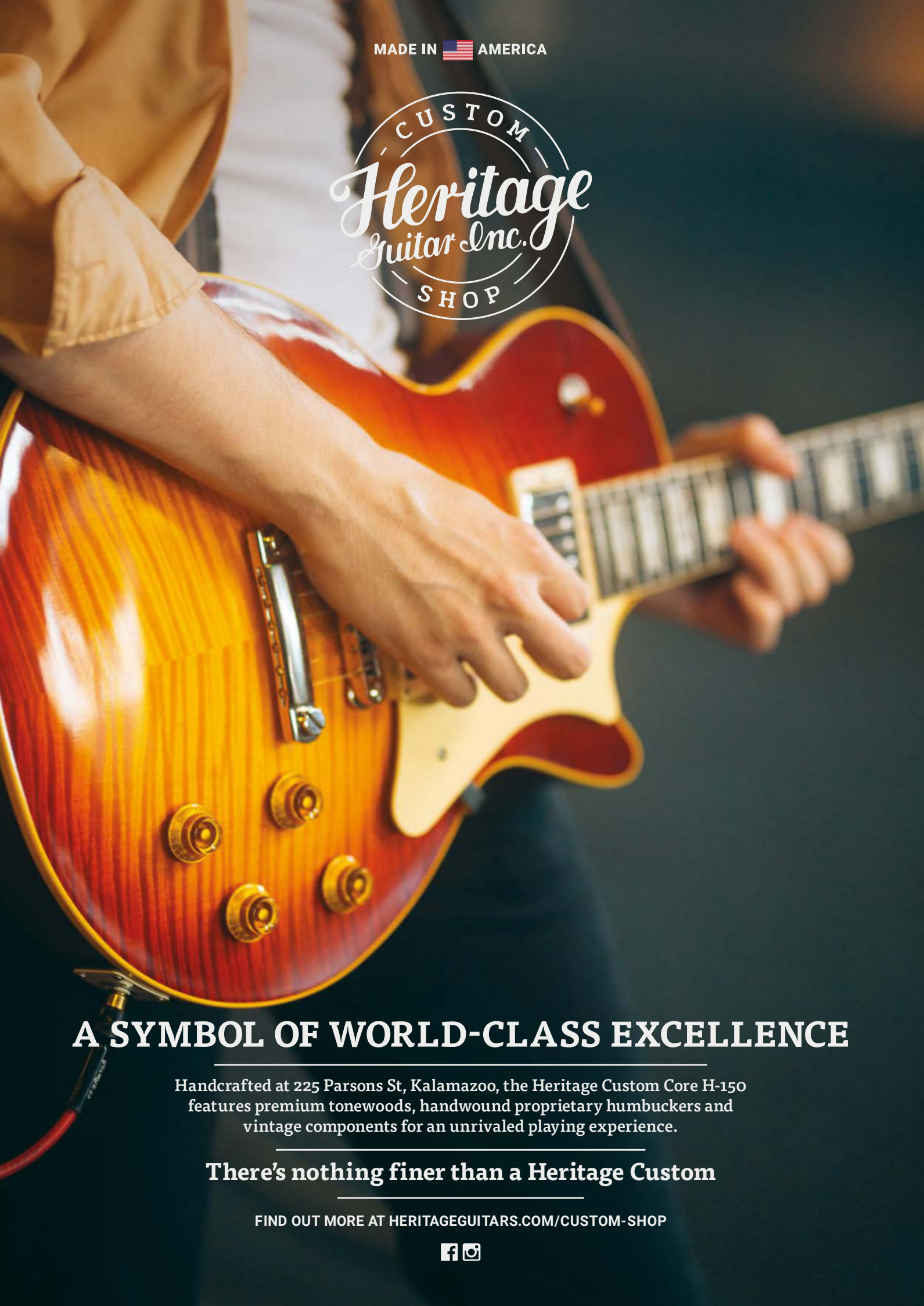
There are virtually delay-free chorus effects available with the delay time at minimum. But it's more rewarding to crank the repeats into self-oscillation then manipulate the time with an expression pedal. The resulting Whammy-like pitch swoops are really something.

Our review unit arrived with a few loose knobs and, more worrying, a tendency to crackle loudly on the first repeat after a hard-struck high note or harmonic. That's pushing the definition of 'charming imperfection' a little too far for our tastes. But the five internal trimpots are easily accessible, and a tweak of the left-most one soon fixed that issue. *G*

8/10 **A modern interpretation of the archetypal analogue delay that builds on the original's strengths and sheds a few of its weaknesses**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Memory Man **£179**
Xvive Memory **£139**
Jam Pedals Delay Llama Xtreme **£295**


MADE IN AMERICA
CUSTOM
Heritage
Guitar Inc.
SHOP
A SYMBOL OF WORLD-CLASS EXCELLENCE
Handcrafted at 225 Parsons St, Kalamazoo, the Heritage Custom Core H-150 features premium tonewoods, handwound proprietary humbuckers and vintage components for an unrivaled playing experience.
There's nothing finer than a Heritage Custom
FIND OUT MORE AT HERITAGEGUITARS.COM/CUSTOM-SHOP

RIFT AMPLIFICATION
EL34

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Yes, Rift has made a stompbox – and this hand-wired Plexi-style EQ and boost pedal is everything you'd expect from one of the UK's most respected amp builders

It would have been easy for Rift Amplification to make its move into the stompbox world with a straightforward medium-gain overdrive in the Marshall-in-a-box mould. But the EL34 is not that pedal. Instead, Rift is offering something more by offering something less.

Here's the angle: the EL34 output valves that powered Marshall's post-1966 Plexi heads were not only there to create distortion, and sometimes you might want to give your amplifier some of that famous British tone without necessarily rattling any of your roof tiles. Therefore, Rift's take on the formula is to focus on EQ rather than gain. The idea here is that you set the pedal's output volume to match your bypass signal, then tweak the tone knob to dial in precisely as much of that classic raspy upper-midrange as you want.

Worried Marshall-esque tones without overdrive are like rhubarb crumble without custard? Don't worry. There's a separate boost circuit with its own gain control, which lets you add more crunch by stomping on a second footswitch.

It sounds simple – simple enough, perhaps, to make that £249 price look a little optimistic – but a peek inside the enclosure soon makes clear where your money's going: this is a fully hand-wired device with no circuit boards of any kind, its components instead linked either directly point-to-point or via a minimal skeleton of perpendicular fixed wires. It's quite the work of art.

Add to all that what we already know about Rift main man (and *Guitar* contributor) Chris Fantana's ear for high-

Plex appeal: this clever pedal provides British Plexi boost in a box

Black metal: the tough enclosure should keep the components safe

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £249
DESCRIPTION EQ and boost pedal, made in the UK
CONTROLS Volume, tone, gain; bypass and boost footswitches
FEATURES True bypass, powered by 9-volt mains supply only
DIMENSIONS 123 x 94 x 51mm
CONTACT riftamps.com

quality amplification and you've got a unit that's clearly aimed at only the most discerning of tone-sniffers.

IN USE

In theory, you could run this pedal into any amp. But we're guessing the most common scenario will be with American-voiced 6V6 and 6L6 types – enabling some instant Atlantic-hopping – so that's how we're doing most of our testing.

It takes no time at all to reach the conclusion that, in terms of pure voicing, Rift has absolutely nailed this thing. With the tone control at noon, our black-panel combo has its low-end bloom gently flattened out, while its sweet midrange is corrupted by just the right amount of snarly attitude.

There's still a bit of bass cut even when we dial the tone back to about 10 o'clock but the real entertainment begins when we wind it up instead, bringing on more and more oh-so-British bite without becoming unpleasantly harsh. Better still, all of this is just as effective with an overdriven amp as it is with a clean one, which allows us to sharpen those buttery tweed tones just like Jim Marshall's engineers did when they tried to clone a 1959 Bassman and accidentally invented heavy rock instead.

Speaking of overdrive, the EL34's own extra gain stage keeps things tasteful in terms of dirt levels – there's no JCM800 fizz here – and emphasises the clonky mids to create a 'second channel' with plenty of cut for solos. Rift's first stompbox is not exactly ripping up the rulebook in terms of functionality, then, but there can be no argument about the restrained brilliance of its execution. *G*

9/10 **A refreshing new approach to the Plexi pedal genre, this understated unit is dripping with sheer quality**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Victory V4 The Sheriff **£379**
DryBell The Engine **€340**
Stone Deaf QBoost **£139**

MYTHOS PEDALS
ORACLE ANALOG ECHO

WORDS ED OLESZKO

Looking for an vintage-style analogue delay with pedalboard-friendly features? The Oracle could be in your future…

Since establishing Mythos Pedals in 2010, Tennessee native Zach Broyles has carved out a niche in the market with a range of toneful and sensibly priced boutique stompboxes. Previously built by Broyles at home, Mythos units are now manufactured in a workshop next door to Novo Guitars (see p110) in Nashville, and the range has expanded from fuzz, overdrive and boost pedals to include analogue delay.

The Oracle Analog Echo was designed in collaboration with John Snyder of Electronic Audio Experiments and draws its inspiration from analogue delay pedals of the 1980s, such as the Boss DM-2 and Ibanez AD9, without being a direct clone. Groundbreaking in their day, these pedals used bucket-brigade chips to deliver warm, musical repeats without the physical bulk and reliability issues of the tape echo units that preceded them.

With a pair of reissue MN3205 BBD chips at its heart, the Mythos unit's modest control layout of delay time, feedback and wet/dry mix echoes the simple and intuitive controls of those 1980s pedals that inspired it. In addition, you'll notice a tap-tempo footswitch, which offers settings beyond that of the 600ms range of the time control, more on which shortly.

IN USE

An original 1982 Ibanez AD9 has graced our pedalboard for more than 15 years, outlasting countless board revisions and modern alternatives that all fell short sonically. However, based on the quality of Zach's drive pedals, we have high hopes for the Oracle.

Echo park: the Oracle's simple layout ensures ease of use

Urban hymn: this is the first Mythos unit that's not a fuzz, boost or OD

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £259
DESCRIPTION Analogue delay pedal with tap tempo and true-bypass switching. Made in the USA
CONTROLS Time, feedback and mix knobs, footswitches for tap tempo and bypass
ADDITIONAL FEATURES Jack socket for external tap-tempo control. Powered by 9V centre-negative adapter only, current draw approx 35mA
DIMENSIONS 118 x 92 x 42mm
CONTACT mythospedals.com

With a Les Paul going into a tweed combo on the edge of break-up, the Oracle immediately nails those vintage analogue delay tones we enjoy so much. The repeats are perfectly voiced to melt effortlessly into a band mix, never dominating nor rhythmically intrusive – regardless of gain level.

At the turn of a knob, the Oracle effortlessly provides everything from perfect slapback to epic solo tones, reverb-like ambience and doubling effects. And it does all this with less background noise than our vintage unit, as well as the convenience of top-mounted jack sockets, true-bypass switching and tap tempo.

Utilising the super-responsive tap-tempo switch to increase the delay time beyond 600ms, the repeats degrade in a satisfyingly glitchy way, with a gnarly lo-fi character. And, of course, on-the-fly tempo tweaks with higher levels of feedback can create epic psychedelic self-oscillation for a set-closing wall of sound if you so wish. With so much flexibility and such ease of use, it's tough not to love the Oracle. *G*

9/10 **Vintage analogue delay tones mixed with modern convenience in a unit that's a worthy successor to the classics that inspired it**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Maxon AD9 Analog Delay Pro **£235**
Analog Man ARDX20 **$265**
JAM Pedals Delay Llama Xtreme **£289**

Robin Stummvoll in his workshop in Kassel, central Germany

INDUSTRY INSIDER

VERSO INSTRUMENTS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

Influenced by industrial design icons and some of the most daring luthiers on the planet, Robin Stummvoll's Verso guitars are a unique proposition combining classic and contemporary production methods

When did you start working with guitars?

"I built my first guitar at the age of 16 – a solidbody lap steel in the shape of a Weissenborn. It took me forever to build but it's still nice to play. The second guitar I built was 13 years later, the first 'sketch' of a guitar I later called Cosmo. In those 13 years, I studied graphic design and, after that industrial design. I finished my diploma with the thesis 'sound does not equal expectations' and designed a guitar made of sheet metal with freely movable pickups. I fell in love with the work as a guitar builder, decided to try it professionally and, from there, it took about three years to build the brand, design a 100 per cent working instrument and learn how to build on a professional level. In November 2020, I opened the doors of Verso Instruments."

You focus on simplified processes and 'unheard' materials. What inspired your ethos?

"I find beauty in things that are simple yet smart in their use of material. I think Dieter Rams and Charles and Ray Eames are the ones that inspired me most. The guitars of Allan Gittler, Uli Teuffel, and Nobuaki Hayashi (Atlansia) opened a world for me. I started to ask questions regarding construction and materials. Sheet metal as a body material offers many opportunities for the players and to me as a builder. The player benefits from new options, like an interchangeable and freely movable pickup system that furthers body resonance and adds unheard overtones. Steel lets me integrate a lot of parts into one single sheet of metal and reduce the overall number of parts to reduce costs, time, and resources."

How does your background in product design influence your luthiery?

"I think as a trained luthier I would've asked different questions than I did as a designer. As a luthier I may have searched for a way to build instruments in the best possible way with the best possible sound. As a designer, I asked for the simplest possible instrument without it sounding or playing strangely. Leo Fender had the same design approach: build something efficient, simple and functional. He was ingenious enough and I was lucky enough that both results sounded good."

The Cosmo features a single, freely movable magnetic pickup

Verso offers a selection of neck carves and woods

The body of the Cosmo is power-coated sheet metal in RAL colours

You also work with traditional techniques, using resins and linseed oil for the wooden elements. How did you find a balance between traditional and contemporary methods?

"I work with everything that makes sense. I use CNC machining because of accuracy and repetition. I use hand planes for surface quality, linseed oil and shellac because of their sustainability, as they're much more restorable and repairable than 'modern' surface techniques like nitro or poly. Many techniques pre-1900 are much more sustainable than new stuff. I think the combination of laser cut and powder-coated metal with French polished wood is fresh, unexpected and beautiful."

Your pickups are wound in-house and are movable when mounted. Why did you design them like this?

"Altering the position of a single pickup makes the usual pickup positions with a three-way switch obsolete. A single-pickup guitar has a much more appealing sound to me – being movable adds a whole universe of timbres. They work under the strings and away from them because it captures the body resonance. You can hold it and create swells just with your hand motion. The requirements for such a pickup are so different to average that I had to build them myself. They look simple but the development was complex and included techniques like baking the coils instead of wax potting them. They also use very small but strong neodymium magnets."

Why use non-adjustable bridges with brass saddles?

"I see adjustable bridges as a positive feature on guitars with a bad setup – it's just leaving the job to someone else. That doesn't mean that all adjustable guitars are bad but the design implies that. Traditional instruments, including acoustics, are almost never adjustable and are superb when set up well. I think an instrument without the option to be adjusted reduces stress for the player. When you play a piano or a violin, you trust and accept your instrument. But on an electric there is always the feeling that it could be better. As a luthier, I want to relieve my players of everything except creating music. The intonation is consistent with the requested set of strings and can be adjusted as on any archtop with a floating bridge."

You use locally sourced tonewoods for the through-neck design. Was that based on sustainability?

"Yes. I think local and tropical woods are different in sound and aesthetic but different doesn't mean better or worse. As a creator of instruments that hopefully inspire musicians and builders, I think it's my responsibility to use local woods exclusively. That's also why I don't use old stock tropical timber. I want to change habits and expectations for the better and this isn't happening with mahogany and ebony in 2021. With acoustics it's a tough discussion but not with electrics."

What's your proudest moment as a maker?

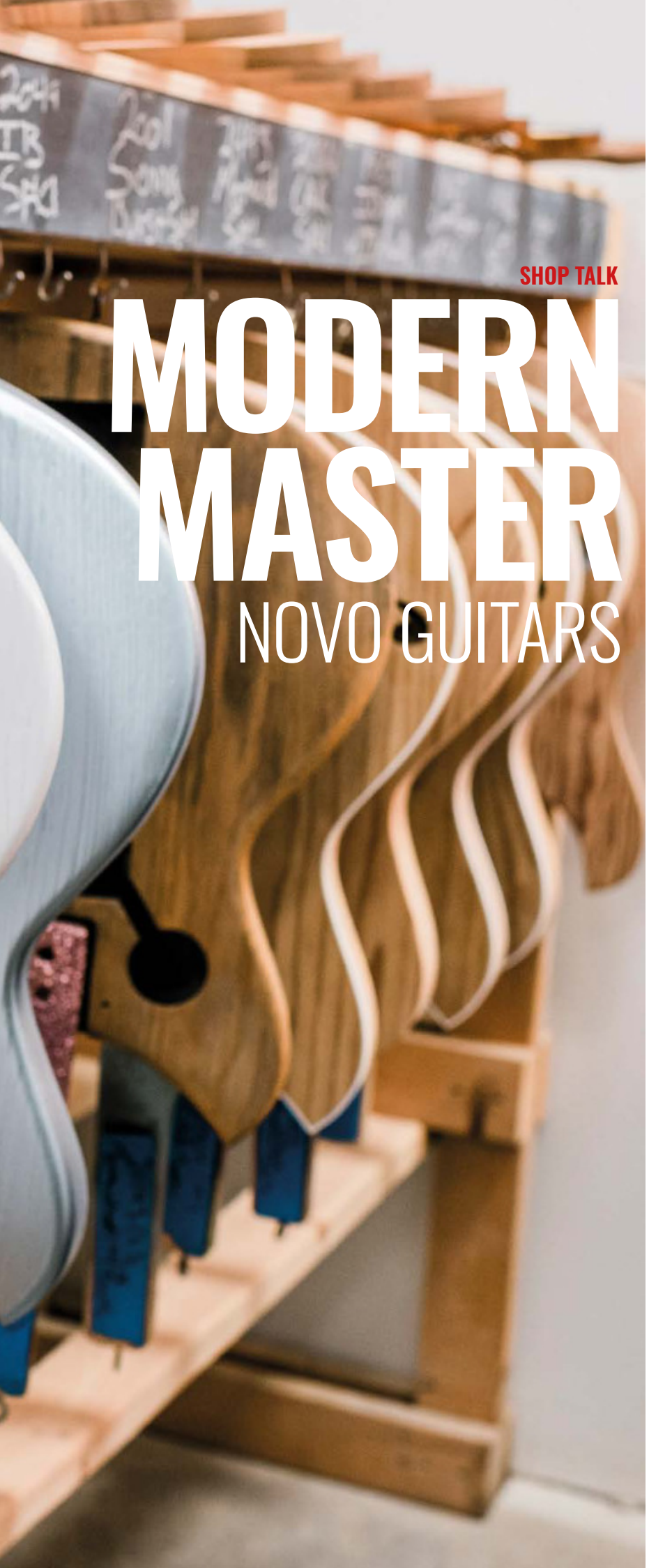
"I'm proud that builders all over the world, among them my heroes, appreciate my work. That's crazy. I often question my work and whether to call myself a luthier, as an untrained, self-made guy. This really helps me believe in myself and the project. It's great to see people understanding the concept of these strange guitars."

What's next for Verso Instruments?

"A short-scale bass, hopefully in the next few months. Longterm, a guitar with a wooden body that's using the same pickup principle." *G*

Visit versoinstruments.com for more

Grape
Jelly
1973
Sienna
Burst
1836
IB



SHOP TALK

MODERN MASTER

NOVO GUITARS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER **PHOTOGRAPHY** ELEANOR JANE

Some indie guitar makers might be fortunate enough to grab the flavour-of-the-month spot just once. Dennis Fano has managed to hold onto it for the best part of a decade, with two different guitar companies

I first encountered Dennis Fano's work in these pages some 20 years ago. My former colleague Rick Batey had interviewed XTC's Andy Partridge, who'd raved about a guitar that was custom-made for him by a little-known builder in New York. That builder, Dennis Fano, was then little-known only because it was the first custom guitar he'd ever made.

"I had put together some kit guitars, bought some bodies and necks from Warmoth and made some for friends and so forth," says Fano. "But that was a big leap – and I kind of skipped over some steps getting there!"

JERSEY BOY

At the time he created the guitar for Partridge, Fano was working as a repairman at Matt Umanov Guitars, the legendary shop on Bleecker Street in New York City's Greenwich Village. The venture was typical of the way the young guitar tech had leapfrogged into enviable positions in the world of luthiery, including securing his own workbench at one of the country's best-respected guitar havens in the first place. But Fano seemed destined to cut a distinctive profile in the industry right from the start and, if the Partridge creation took him almost prematurely from repairing to building, there are thousands of Fano and Novo players today who are certainly glad he got there sooner rather than later.

Fano was born in New Jersey in 1970 and moved with his family to Florida and then North Carolina before settling back in Bloomfield, about 20 minutes south of New York City, in his early teens. Sport had been the big draw of his youth. Fano played American football, baseball and – as the Yanks call it – soccer, before that 1980s music-video sensation hit the airwaves and lured him over to the dark side.

"Then MTV came out," he says. "I was 13 when I started liking groups like Def Leppard; they were my first favourite group. My oldest brother was listening to The Police and Led Zeppelin and Rush and stuff like that, so I ended up picking up on some of that, and that's still some of my favourite music to this day. But it wasn't until I got back to New Jersey and I was about 14 that I picked up my first guitar."

Fano's experimentation started early, and he began manipulating that first instrument to suit his tastes. "At first I had a very inexpensive nylon-string guitar that my mom had purchased for me," he says. "I think

it cost about 30 bucks – and it didn't take long for me to take the top two strings off and start playing it like a bass, because I was drawn to the bass more than to the guitar. That probably had to do with the Def Leppard videos, with Rick Savage playing the Kramer and all those pointy guitars. I got an electric bass for Christmas shortly after that and I was in three or four bands before I knew it. Not that I knew how to play. I was the only kid in town with a bass, so people would just say, 'You're in the band!'"

Playing in bands in high school led Fano to further mess around with his own guitars, which then led to putting together kit guitars for friends. Following the instinct further, he decided to convert his own '66 Jazz Bass (already heavily messed with, he assures us) to an eight-string bass equipped with three EMG pickups. But he got stuck on the nut. A local repairman named Darrell Gilbert, who also worked at the Gibson Showroom in New York City, sorted the nut for him but was impressed with the rest of the work Fano had done on the instrument. The encounter saw Fano quiz Gilbert on how he might get into the business. The more experienced repairman then invited Fano to come to the shop on Saturday afternoons to learn how it was done.

Sometime after Gilbert himself had taken a position at Umanov's, the shop required a third repairman. Gilbert recommended his some-time apprentice and Fano got the job.

"It wasn't until I went to Umanov's that I started taking it seriously," says Fano. "I was kind of lost and didn't know what to do with myself. I got the job and spent five years there doing repairs on everything from ukuleles to acoustic guitars, electric guitars and basses – anything with strings on it. I had Darrell and one other senior repairman there showing me the ropes and teaching me how to do good work."

SUPER FANO

As we well know, however, that repair gig would not be with Fano for the long haul. "I was working at Matt Umanov Guitars and I had a customer come in," he recalls. "I recognised the name, David Yasbek, and I knew that he had just worked with my favourite band of all time, XTC. So, out of character for me, I just said to him, 'You're *the* David Yasbek, right?' And he said, 'Uh, I guess so…' I had an XTC tattoo and had the artwork hanging up over my bench, so he could see that we had that in common. We talked a little and, at the end of the conversation I just said,

Denis Fano © Novo Guitars

"ONCE I STARTED DOING THE DISTRESSING, THAT PRECIOUSNESS WENT AWAY. THOSE GUITARS FELT BROKEN-IN, IT WOULD ALREADY HAVE SCRATCHES"

'Next time you talk to Andy, just let him know that there's somebody out there that would love to build him a guitar'."

Little did Fano know that Yasbek was going to be on the phone with Andy Partridge the very next day, saying "Oh, by the way, I went down to Umanov's and there's this kid working in the repair shop and he said he'd like to build you a guitar."

"I'd given him my number," Dennis remembers, "and I was blown away. He called me the next day and said, 'Here's Andy's number, give him a call!'"

It took Fano three days to work up the courage to make the call. But when he did, he found himself as bold as ever. "We talked a little bit about it over the phone. We traded some images of it over the fax machine – I still have them tucked away somewhere in the archives – because it was back in '95 so I didn't have a computer or internet or an email account or any of that stuff. And, being really bold and young and not really knowing that much about guitar building, I said, 'Tell me what you want and I'll make it!'"

In what was largely still a pre-internet age, Partridge took the leap on the strength of their discussions and exchanges of ideas, and the superfan built the XTC player a guitar that he was clearly quite thrilled with, judging from his enthusiasm in the pages of *Guitar Magazine* a few years later. It was quite a leap, considering Fano's paucity of experience, yet the collaboration helped to kick the fledgling maker up to the next level, confidence-wise at least.

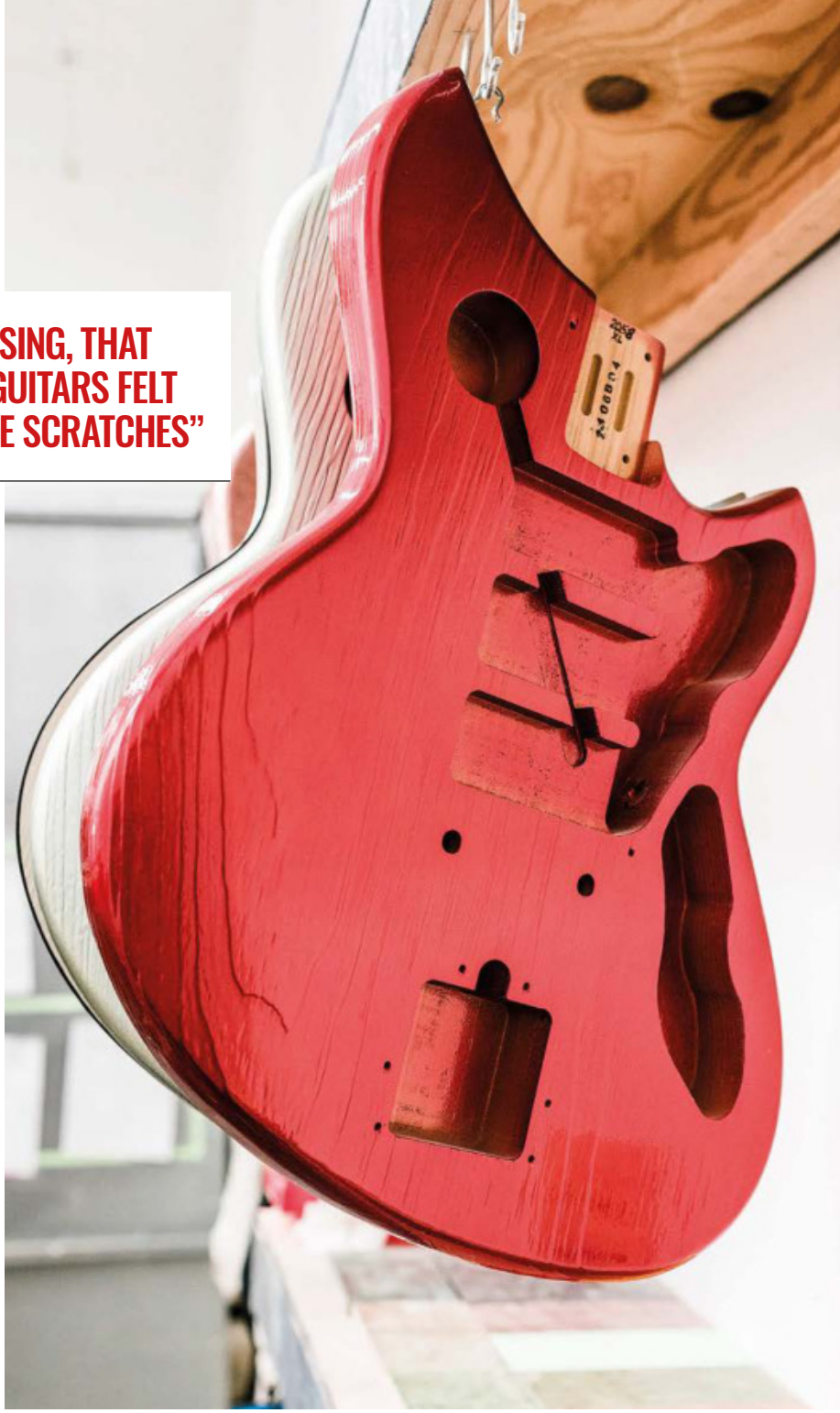
"He'd been approached over the years to play certain guitars," says Fano, "to endorse them, and had always turned that down. Then somebody came to him and said, 'I'll build you anything you like,' so he thought that was cool. He didn't know anything about me and he found out in retrospect I'd never built a custom guitar before [laughs]. I was working in a repair shop and basically the five years I spent at Umanov's was like going to college for me. After five years there, I said, 'Okay, I don't want to repair guitars for a living, I want to build guitars'. I'd got some ideas about what I wanted to do, and I decided to just take that leap."

ALTERNATE REALITY

Fano's early work as a guitar maker involved mainly one-offs, primarily high-end efforts that fit the image of a custom guitar shop. A few years in, however, he developed an overarching concept that would come to define his work for the much wider audience that was waiting. He wanted to do something that would help him stand out amid the many makers of Custom Strats, Superstrats and Tele-style guitars, and devised a stylish means of getting there.

"I wanted to do something that had elements of classic designs," he says, "but do them in a twisted way. So I kind of dreamt of this concept: what if there were this guitar company that existed back in the 50s that was actually a conglomeration of all of these companies that we know, but they were all under one roof. You'd have your Gibson and Fender, and your Rickenbacker, Gretsch, Guild… How might some of the things that we think of as being from classic guitars have been different if all of those builders and designers were under one roof?"

The line that embodied that vision, launched in the mid-2000s, was first called the Artifact Series. Models such as the RB6, SP6 and TC6 and others displayed crossbred elements such as a Rickenbacker-inspired body with bolt-on neck and six-a-side headstock,



A freshly sprayed Candy Apple Red Novo Serus J hangs from the drying rack at Novo HQ in Nashville

an erstwhile LP Special wannabe with Tele-style pickups, and so on. Just as the guitars began gaining popularity, however, Fano discovered that the historic creator of Fender's first series of Relic guitars, Vince Cunetto, was using the Artifact name on a run of guitars he was building himself.

"But I still like the idea of artifact," he says, "and started playing around with it, and put together the term Alt de Facto because it sounded like artifact if you said it fast enough [laughs]. It was kind of a way of breaking up artifact and making it alternate-reality, taking a little poetic license there. So maybe the alternate reality is that all of these companies were under one roof as a collective."

A hallmarks of the Alt de Facto series that has carried over into Fano's Novo guitars, is the distressing – the shop-applied playwear that other makers call 'relic'ing' or 'factory ageing'. While players remain eager to discuss the veracity of such work – some disparagingly – the premise of Fano's guitars arguably provides a simple justification for its inclusion: if these are intended as guitars made in some forgotten legendary facility of the 1950s and 60s, it makes total sense that they look that way. But for Fano, though, the practice came about out of a desire to meet another goal entirely.

"Between 2000 and 2006 or early 2007, when I made the first Artifact," he says, "I was building all of these bespoke one-off custom guitars that were very ornamental, dipped in glass, super clean. And I had a lot of customers – by the time I'd completed the guitar and put all of that work into it – say, 'This guitar is beautiful! I don't want to put a scratch on it. I'm not even going to play it, I'm going to keep it in its case!' And I'm like, 'No! I built that guitar so you could play it and make music with it.' After a number of those, I thought, 'There has to be a better way. You have got to be able to make a guitar and hand it to someone and not have them just baby it but actually want to dig in and play this instrument.' So, it was kind of out of that need – wanting the guitars to be played and do what they were built for."

Ageing the guitars would prove to be an antidote to customer sentimentality. "Once I started doing the distressing, that preciousness went away," he says. "You could take those guitars the first time and it would feel broken-in, it would already have scratches, the lacquer would be worn away on the edges and the back of the neck, and it not only felt better but people were sort of responding to the idea that, 'Oh, it's a new guitar but I don't need to feel too precious about it.'"

TEMPERED TANTRUM

Starting in 2009, the Fano brand further proliferated through a deal with Premier Builder's Guild (PBG), which ramped up the production of team-built guitars in Arroyo Grande, California, while Dennis continued to make a smaller number of one-offs in Fleetwood,

The Novo Voltur (opposite) was launched in late 2020 alongside the twin-pickup Solus H2 as part of the company's 2021 lineup

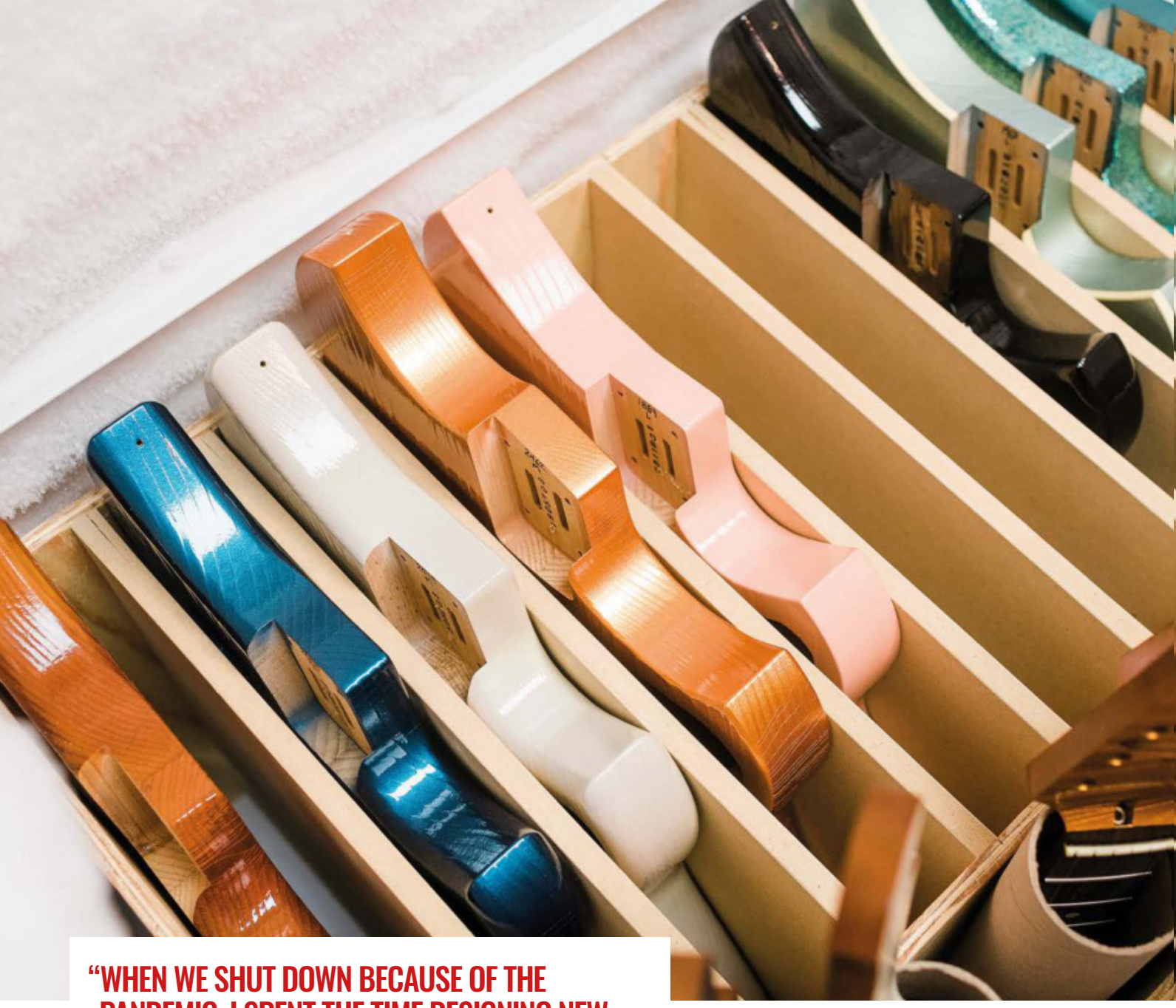
Pennsylvania, where he'd lived and worked for several years. Dennis Fano parted with PBG in 2014, leaving his eponymous brand name behind in the deal, and the Fano line passed to Desert Son Musical Instruments in 2016, when PBG folded.

Meanwhile, in 2014 Fano launched an entirely new guitar company, Novo Guitars. If anything, Novo instruments would become even more hotly desirable on the boutique market than the creations that had carried his surname. And while many players could undoubtedly trace the lineage, they represented a new style and ethos from a maker who was again proving that he had an inside track on the hip and happening.

"There's a DNA that's recognisable," says Fano. "But making that transition from what I was doing with Fano to Novo, I knew I had to go in a slightly different direction. Originally with Novo, I came up with the Sectis, which is more of a contemporary design. I wasn't doing distresses right out of the gate. I thought, 'I've got to put some space between what I used to do and what I do now.' But it wasn't very long after starting Novo that I really liked what I was doing, so I took this new model, the Novo Sectis, and did some traditional versions of that. That's where the Serus T, Serus S, and Serus J came from."

In addition to the new Novo body style – an original offset somewhat larger than anything other than the existing JM-inspired Fano JP6 – the Serus line ushered in Novo's prominent use of thermally aged woods (aka baked, roasted or torrefied), supplied by the Tempered Tonewoods company of Sonoma, California. For many players, this has become a calling card of the brand as much as the novel look and the luscious distressing.

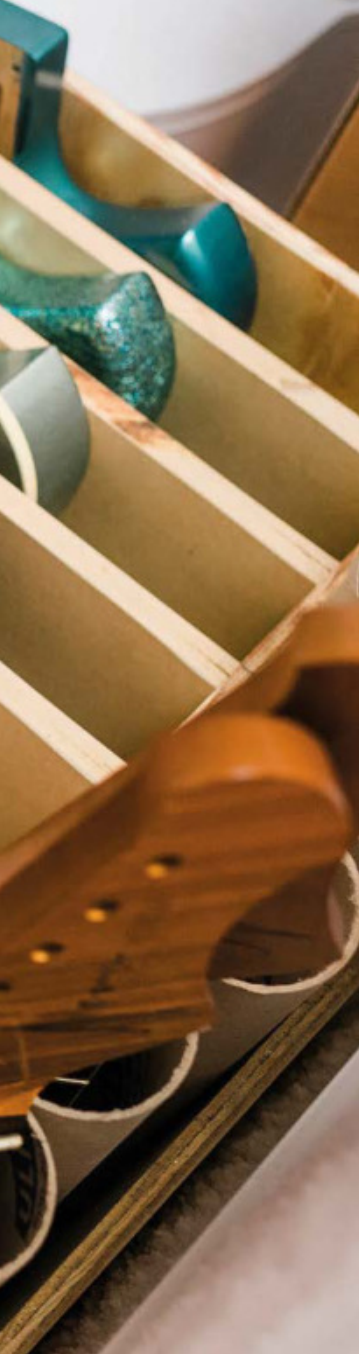
"I had spoken with Hans [Brede] at Tempered Tonewoods pretty early on," says Fano. "And I knew there was something going on there. When Novo was getting off the ground, maybe the first half a dozen or eight guitars were made out of non-tempered wood. But I quickly wanted to start incorporating the thing. Hans had sent me some tempered butternut and red pine, some tempered basswood, a variety of materials to work with, and I knew that there was something there that I wanted to explore further. The guitars just resonated extremely well. Acoustically, they were very loud. It was unlike any of the kiln-dried materials I had been using up to that point. It was kind of this lightning bolt moment: 'This is what I should be doing! I should be using as much of this stuff as I can.' And we've continued to use it up to this day."



"WHEN WE SHUT DOWN BECAUSE OF THE PANDEMIC, I SPENT THE TIME DESIGNING NEW GUITARS. I THINK I CAME UP WITH 16 OR 17"

When probed for the secret behind the rampant popularity of Novo guitars these past few years, Fano reveals that, other than the carefully selected woods, the key factor might simply be good old-fashioned attention to detail.

"And it's probably something that you've heard from other builders who are doing really good work," he says. "There's no shortcuts. You just have to take your time. We have 21 employees now, which is huge. I would never think Novo would get to be that size, I thought it would be me and maybe a handful of other people. But with 21 people, we're still only shipping somewhere between 45 to 50 guitars a month. If you add up all those hours – and of course we have some office staff – and if you account for people with hands on instruments and how many we're shipping, it's still relatively few. We're looking at ways to make our process more efficient without cutting corners. We want to continue to do what we're doing but do it more efficiently, so we can think about scaling the operation and maybe look at doing 125 or 150 guitars



This Korina P2 was part of a limited-edition eight-piece run with korina bodies and African blackwood fingerboards

a month, because I think the demand is there for the instruments. But it all comes back to attention to detail."

NASHVILLE SKYLINE

Four years ago, Fano transported the entire Novo operation from Pennsylvania to Nashville. It seemed an interesting move for a guitar maker that hadn't been heavily associated with the country scene up until that time. But it makes total sense once he explains it:

"I knew that this would be a really good place to sort of mine some talent. You've got a lot of players in town, young players who maybe want to be a part of a company like we wanted to build. And it's really worked out well. W have got some fantastic people working for us, and I see us being here for a good, long time. I have a general manager in Matthew Timmons and an operations manager in Steven Fazio. Those guys… I could leave today and say, 'They've got it. They can handle it.'"

A more affordable, Asian-made range of Dennis Fano designs soon followed under the Rivolta banner, then late in 2020 Novo introduced their first entirely new body shape since the inception of the company. The Solus M-1 and F-1 are single-pickup, single-cutaway models with shorter, 24.75-inch scale lengths. Two-pickup renditions followed, and now Novo is ramping up for a creative explosion of sorts, which should introduce several new models over the next year and a half.

Renderings shared with us in a top-secret document reveal a series of guitars with S-type, Rickenbacker, Gretsch, and Duo-Sonic leanings, respectively, but all with Fano's by-now distinctive design touches and clear common ground with existing Novo models.

"Last year, when we shut down for seven weeks because of the pandemic," says Fano, "I spent the time designing new guitars. I think I came up with 16 or 17 new designs, so I've got a well to go back to. We're introducing a couple of new models at the end of this year and going into the spring of next year, which I'm really excited about. I feel there's enough there to mine that we've got plenty to hold us over for the next few years."

For the many diehard fans of the man's work thus far, these words alone should set the saliva flowing – and the orders rolling in. *G*

Visit novoguitars.com for more

Dennis Fano © Novo Guitars

TEISCO

INTERFACE

INFINITE ROUTING POSSIBILITIES AT YOUR FEET

INTRODUCING THE AUDIO INTERFACE THAT LIVES ON YOUR PEDALBOARD

Run your DAW and favorite studio effects through your amplifier,
and record up to two guitars while you play!

EXPLORE OUR ANALOG PEDAL RANGE

teisco.com @weareteisco

DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO CONVERT YOUR STRAT INTO A BARITONE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY HUW PRICE

Ever wondered what your Stratocaster would be like with a 27-inch scale length? We grab one of Fender's new aftermarket Sub-Sonic Baritone necks and find out how easy it is to install

This is one of those projects that could either end up being simple or a massive headache. Hopefully, however, by the end of it, the guitar's owner will possess all the low-register growl and rumble he desires. Our donor guitar is a Fender EOB Sustainer Stratocaster and the goal is to swap the regular 21-fret neck for Fender's Sub-Sonic Baritone Stratocaster neck. It seems like it should be a straightforward job but there's always the possibility of hitting a few snags along the way.

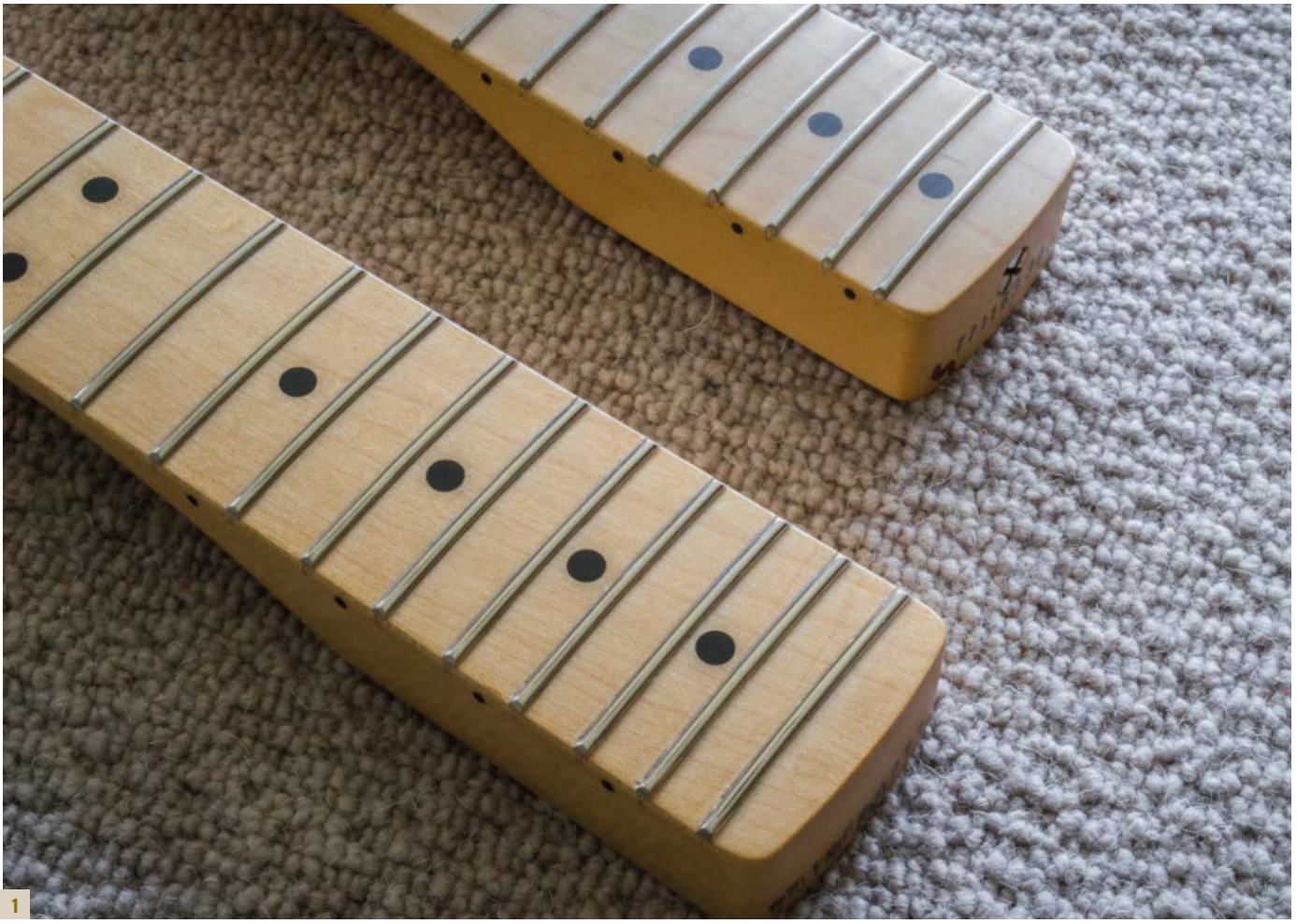
The new neck features 22 medium-jumbo frets and, once installed, the guitar's scale length will increase to 27 inches. The tuner post holes are pre-drilled for Fender locking tuners, with six pairs of locating pin holes. Fender recommends this neck for regular Fender and Squier Stratocaster bodies. The instructions, however, state that there's no guarantee the neck will fit into every neck pocket without making modifications. Time to find out what we're up against.

NECK SWAP

The first thing I need to determine is whether the baritone neck will fit this Strat body. The strings are no longer required, so I detune them and snip them off. With all four screws removed, the neck lifts out and I'm able to test-fit the baritone neck. It's very tight in the pocket but I'm relieved to discover that it presses home with no damage to finish. Thankfully, no risky modifications will be necessary here. Happily, the baritone neck has six pre-drilled screw holes that are designed to align with various screw layouts, which makes the job much easier.

With the neck in situ, I use a length of string to check the screw hole positions, which confirms that everything lines up and that the pilot holes have sufficient depth. To ensure everything will screw back together without drama, I remove the neck and mark the hole depth on the screw threads using masking tape.

Next, I drive the screws into the pre-drilled holes using an electric screwdriver



1

2

on a very low torque setting. To ease the process, I apply wax to the screw threads before tapping the holes, and the low-torque setting ensures the screws stop turning once they reach the full depth of the pilot holes.

TUNER INSTALLATION

Installing these tuners is about as easy as it gets. They press into the holes and all I have to do is align the pins with the pin holes. They're a tight fit too, so they all stay in place when I flip the neck over.

The bushings screw down onto the tuner housings to clasp the whole assembly together. I use my Music Nomad multi-tool's 10mm socket and, because the tool is nylon, it leaves the metal plating unscratched. Getting things finger-tight is fine because if you over-tighten, you'll end up making circular indentations on the headstock from the washers.

BLOCKING OFF

Next, I need to disable the vibrato. The idea is to bring the bridge plate flat to the body so that the saddles can be adjusted as far back as possible. Despite the increased scale length, the guitar's owner is concerned that it may be difficult to get the lowest strings to intonate accurately. Though it's a shame not to have use of the whammy bar, he also feels that the tuning is likely to be more stable this way.

My method is to crank the claw screws until the bridge plate is flat to the body, which is easy when there are no strings on the guitar. I use digital callipers to measure the gap between the block and the body so

3

4

1 With both nuts aligned, it's easy to compare the length of Fender's baritone neck with a regular Strat neck

2 The neck comes with six pre-drilled screw holes, which line up with nicely with the screw holes in the body

3 After marking the hole depth with blue tape and applying wax to the screw threads, the screw holes are tapped before fixing the neck to the body

4 The baritone neck comes pre-drilled for Fender locking tuners and their locating pins. Two of the F badges on this set also need to be glued back on

that I can cut and sand a wood block to the required thickness.

This should be another fairly tight fit – but not so tight that it can't be tapped into place quite easily. Here I use a mahogany offcut and, once it's in position, I loosen off each of the claw springs a couple of turns before screwing the neck onto the body.

SADDLE SORE

The pre-installed nut on the neck has shallow guide notches for the strings, so I capo the strings at the first fret to roughly set the saddle heights. This reveals an unexpected issue: the saddles all need to be raised to achieve a reasonable action and allow for the greater string movement that occurs with heavy string gauges in lower tunings at this scale length.

The problem with vintage-style saddles is their extremely shallow grub screw holes. When the action is jacked up as high as it needs to be, the height adjustment screws are barely inside the holes and therefore extremely unstable. This is particularly apparent on the third and fourth strings. Swapping to a set of modern block-style saddles with screw holes that pass through the full depth of the saddle solves the issue, but I still have to raid my parts box for 3/8" screws for the two centre saddles.

SETTING UP

Nut files are expensive so it might be more cost-effective to delegate this part of the conversion to a tech. Unless, of course, you already own a set or plan to swap necks on a regular basis and can justify the expense and the time needed to learn how to do it.

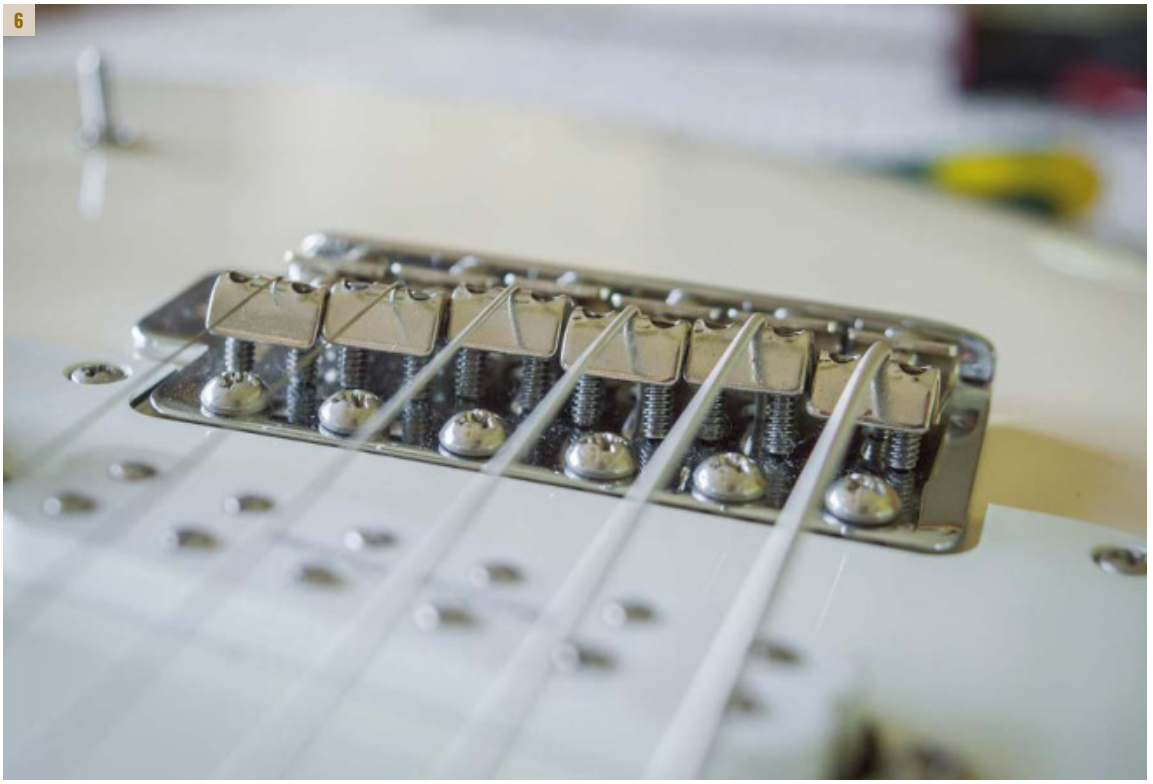
5

5 A block of mahogany of the correct thickness is tapped into the space between the bridge block and the body to disable the vibrato

6 Vintage-style saddles are unsuitable for this conversion because they don't provide sufficient support for the height-adjustment screws when set to the higher action that a baritone requires

7 Nut files and a round needle file are used to slot the nut, and a string tree is needed for the top strings

8 With the new saddles providing sufficient stability, the lowest string saddle's spring is discarded and its intonation adjustment screw shortened so it can be adjusted all the way back



6

That said, a regular 6th string nut file won't be wide enough for the baritone's 0.062-gauge string. Here, I have to use the 6th string file for the 5th string, the 5th for the 4th and so on. I start the 6th string slot with the nut file and then open it out using a round needle file.

Although minimising wraps around the posts is generally the convention with locking tuners, there is insufficient break angle here with the baritone neck. Fender's staggered tuner set helps, and the three lowest string posts are designed for multiple wraps, which I recommend. I'd also suggest adding a string tree for the two highest strings.

Despite the extra scale length, the saddles have to be set pretty far back for accurate intonation. This is especially true of the saddles for the two lowest strings and, for the lowest, I'm obliged to remove the spring and saw off the end of the intonation screw to create sufficient space for the string to pass through. This could've been avoided if the neck had been made a little longer.

Even so, this is a viable project. Just don't expect it to be as simple as bolting on a baritone neck and throwing on a set of heavy strings. Depending on the hardware fitted to your Strat, you may encounter issues that have to be overcome before you have a functional baritone guitar. However, once we plug in, it proves to have been well worth the effort. *G*

To find out more about Huw's work, visit huwpriceguitar.com

Fender
HOSCO

7

8

High end Custom & Customised Kit Guitars,
made in the UK
If You can Dream it,
We can help YOU
Build it!
Get in touch:
office@crimsonguitars.com
for more information &
Get 10% off your order
with the code: customkit10
CRIMSON
UK Built Guitars
Luthier's Tools
& Training

AMPLIFIER FAQ

Work on Bernie Marsden's amplifier collection continues as Rift's Chris Fantana gets to grips with a rare Marshall combo

Have a burning question about your amp or, worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

1

1 This Marshall Capri is missing its logo

2 A simple but robust two-valve circuit nestled in the top of the cabinet

3 This 13x8" elliptical speaker is an unusual one

4 All components are easily accessible across the board

5 The Capri's filter capacitors are beginning to bulge, a sign that they need replacing

6 The output transformer has a Zobel network to improve the sound

The latest amplifier up for inspection from Bernie Marsden's collection is this mini-Marshall dressed in bright-red tolex. The Capri was one of Marshall's famous catalogue amplifiers – models that were only available by mail order. According to its chassis label, it's rated at seven watts. I cannot find a schematic, either online or in any of my old service data books, but thankfully this one is quite a simple circuit. Drawing it out takes all of 15 minutes.

It's difficult to confirm exact shipping numbers on the Capri but general internet wisdom suggests that approximately 100 units were made, most around 1969 and in an unusual 2x8 format. This taller version dates to September 1971 and, unlike other 1x10 examples found online, it's factory loaded with a 13-inch x 8-inch elliptical speaker.

CIRCUIT TALK

Those familiar with other low-wattage amplifiers such as the Fender Champ and Vox AC4 will see similarities in the circuit topology of the Capri. There's a single ECC83 providing two stages of amplification before a single power valve in the output stage, in this case an EL84. It's a simple formula that proves surprisingly capable.

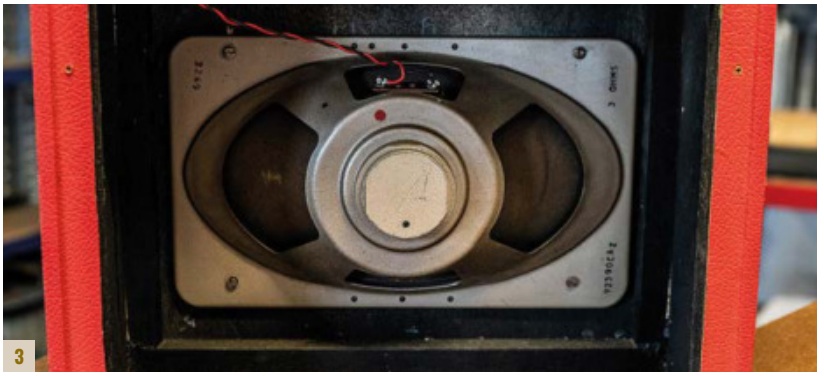
The circuit has two inputs, one high and one low, and uses the now ubiquitous pair of 68k grid-stoppers and single 1M grid leak resistor found in almost every amplifier since the late 1950s.

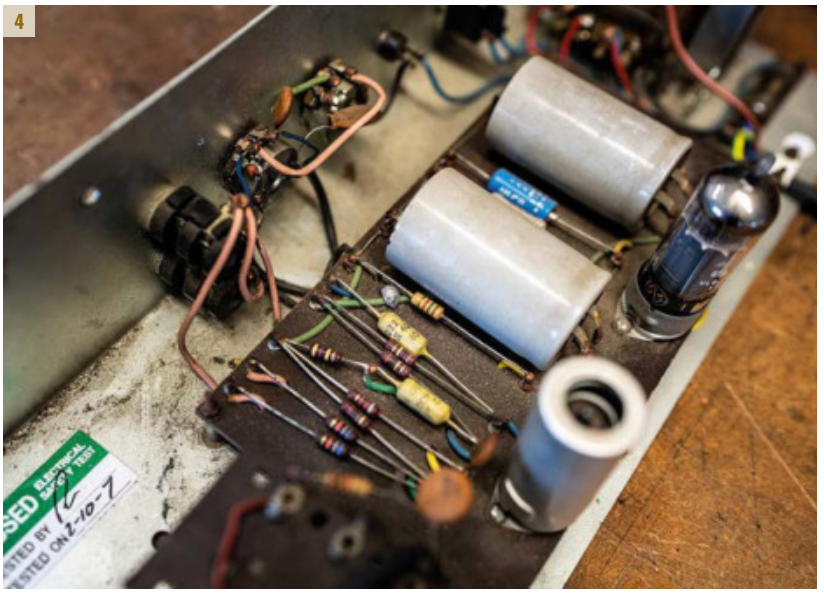
The first gain stage (one triode of the ECC83) is biased warmer than the second stage, pushing the operating point more towards class A and therefore generating more harmonic distortion when the stage is pushed into overdrive.

The second gain stage is operated closer to the centre point of the load line, allowing less distortion but much more accurate reproduction of the signal, before being worked on by the tonestack.

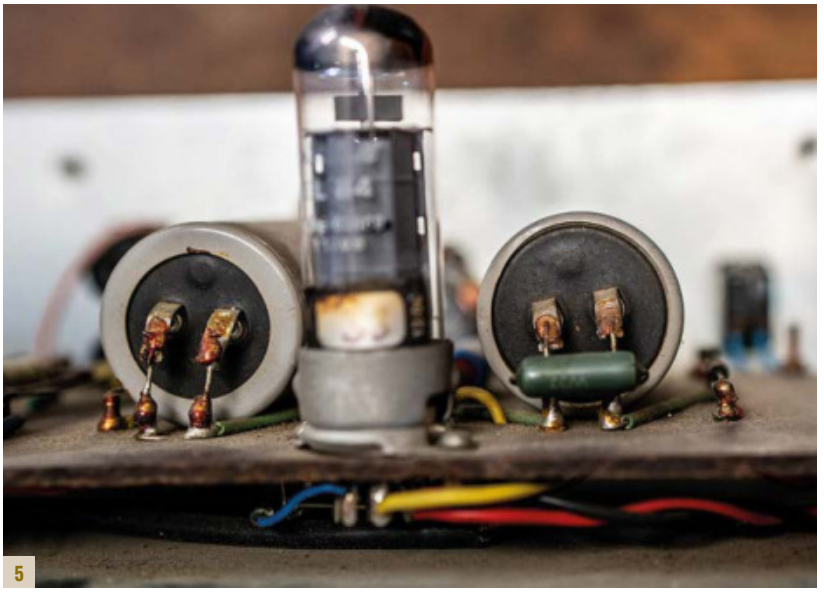
Speaking of which, what we have here is a simple volume and tone arrangement that feeds into the control grid of the single EL84 output valve and,

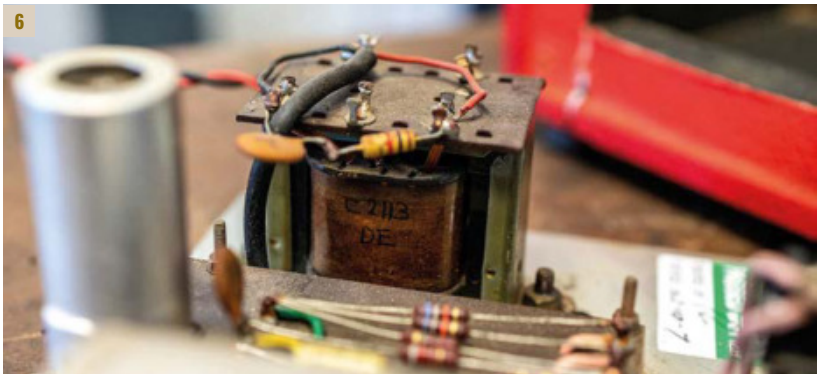
2


3



4


5


6

just like almost every other single-ended output stage, this one is cathode biased.

This amp also sports a feature uncommonly in guitar amplifiers: a Zobel network. This consists of a capacitor and resistor in series, placed across the output transformer's primary winding. Its function is to help minimise the impedance rise of the speaker above the resonance frequency. In layman's terms, it helps smooth out the sound.

AFTER-DINNER SPEAKER

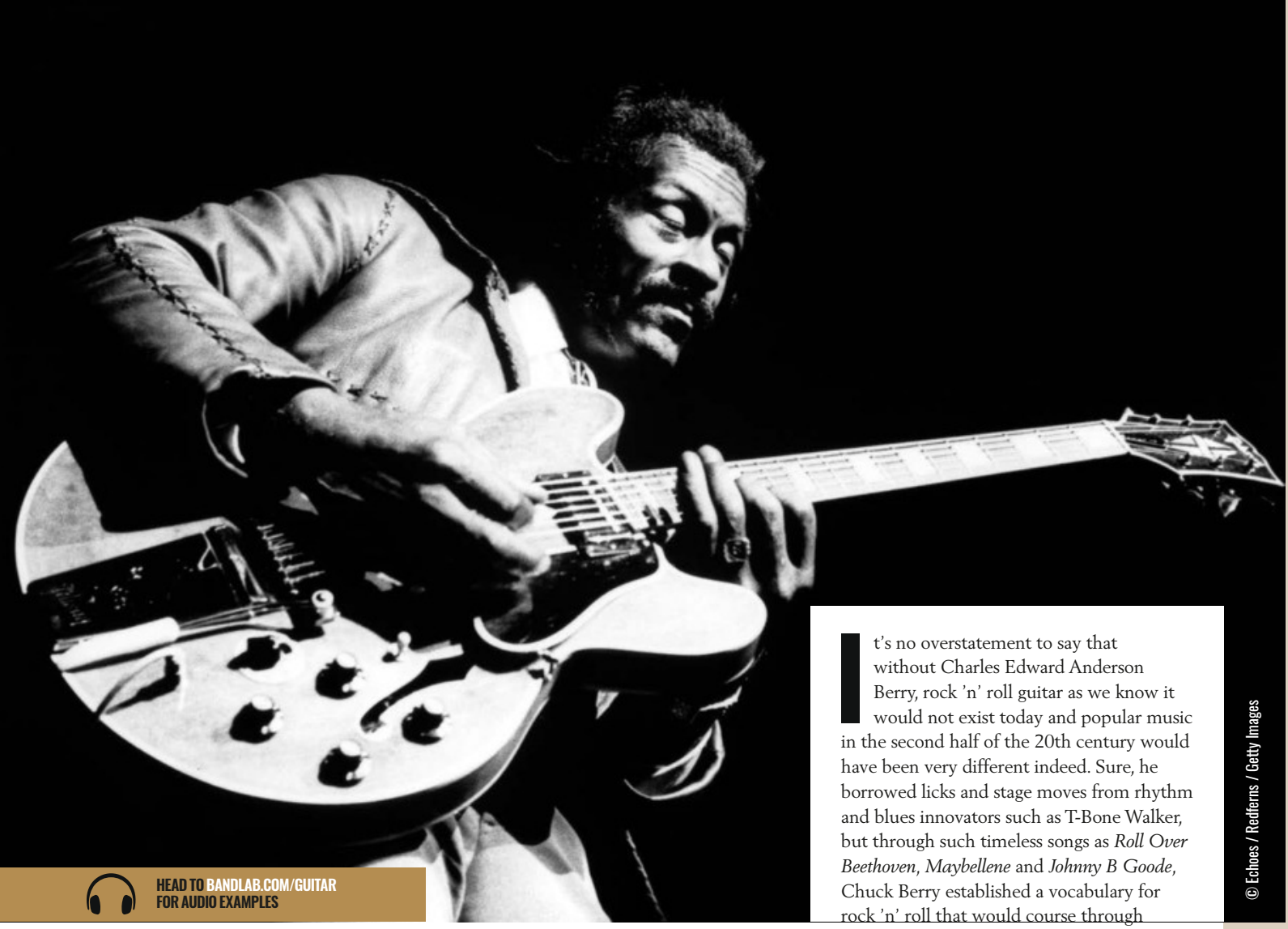
The amp drives a single elliptical speaker made by EMI. Due to the small magnet, I'd guess it's rated for 10 watts or so, with quite a wide frequency response. I can't find much information on this particular speaker, model 92390CAZ, but the non-CAZ model was widely used in hifi equipment of this era.

A quick listen through our bench amplifier reveals that it's quite well suited to a low-wattage application, although not exceptional. An interesting choice, then, and it perhaps confirms the theory that these amplifiers were built using leftover parts that were lying around the factory.

The Capri is fantastic fun to play and I've found that it's particularly good at reproducing Stratocaster quack in positions two and four. Aided by this amp, my rosewood-board American Strat with 50s pickups is able to pull off a phenomenal funk impression.

A PAT test sticker shows that this amplifier was last safety checked in 2007 and, judging by the condition of its two large electrolytic capacitors, it hasn't had much attention since then. As with the Gibson amplifiers we've serviced recently, Bernie wants to put the Capri to work. So, when the parts arrive, we'll finally be giving this unusual amp the attention it deserves. G

Visit riftamps.com to check out Rift's range of UK-built boutique amps



© Echoes / Redferns / Getty Images

HEAD TO BANDLAB.COM/GUITAR FOR AUDIO EXAMPLES

FIVE MINUTES TO...

CHUCK BERRY

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

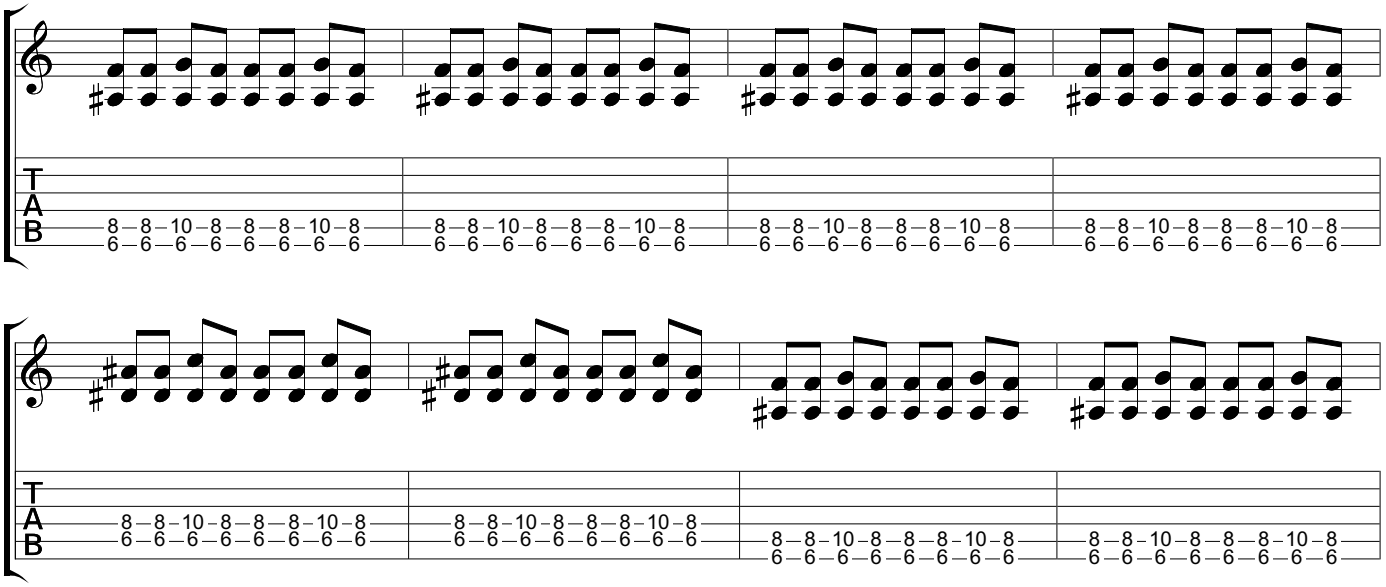
It don't take but a few minutes to master the techniques that have formed the bedrock of rock 'n' roll guitar for almost seven decades

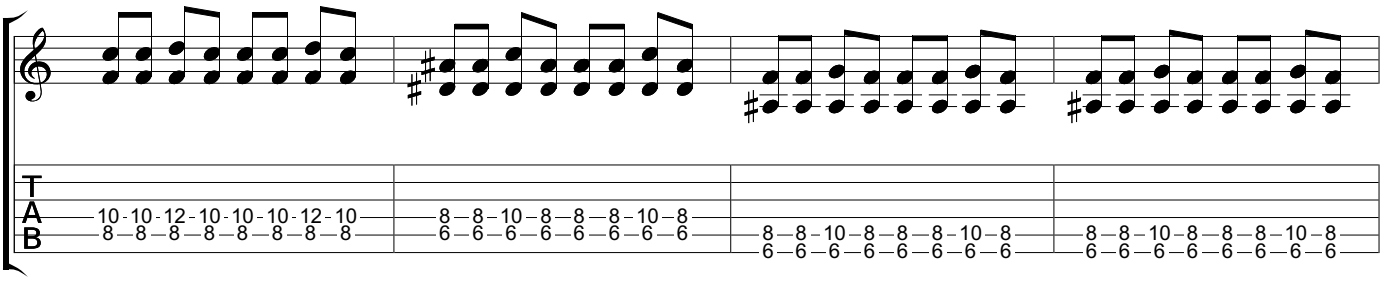
It's no overstatement to say that without Charles Edward Anderson Berry, rock 'n' roll guitar as we know it would not exist today and popular music in the second half of the 20th century would have been very different indeed. Sure, he borrowed licks and stage moves from rhythm and blues innovators such as T-Bone Walker, but through such timeless songs as *Roll Over Beethoven*, *Maybellene* and *Johnny B Goode*, Chuck Berry established a vocabulary for rock 'n' roll that would course through the veins of every high-octane guitarist who followed in his wake.

We don't have the space here to teach you how to duckwalk like Chuck himself but we can show you the basic electric guitar techniques that made him a star, inspiring everyone from The Beatles and The Rolling Stones to Marty McFly…

12-BAR RHYTHM

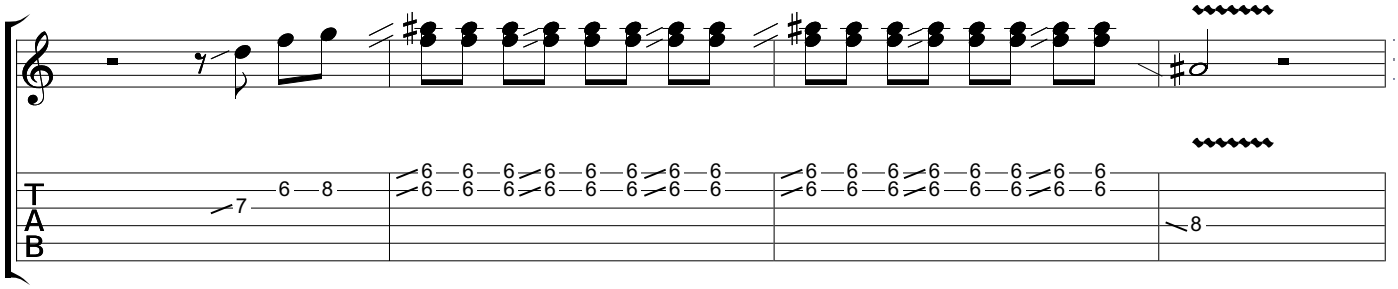
Chuck Berry kept his rhythm playing mostly in the 12-bar blues format. So what makes his playing special? Speed. To capture that authentic Chuck-style blues shuffle, downpick throughout this progression – and hit it hard.





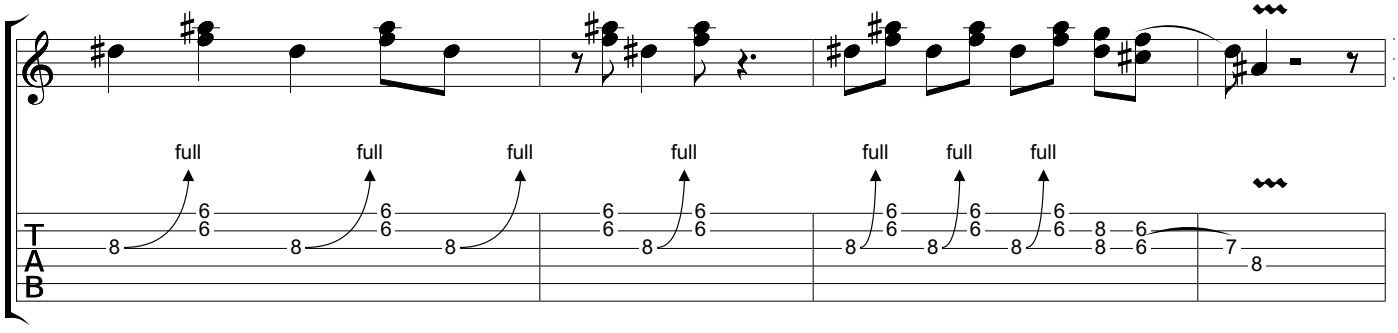
SLIDING DOUBLESTOPS

An huge component of Chuck Berry's lead guitar style was his use of doublestops. This lick is derived from the B♭ major pentatonic and uses a series of doublestops on the B and high E strings, with rhythmically placed slides.



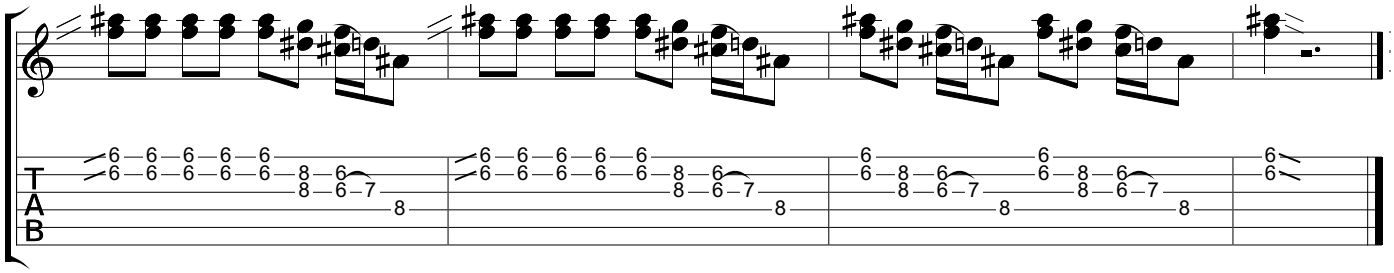
STACCATO BENDS

This lick uses more doublestops but this time alongside some choppy, staccato-style string bends. This lick should look fairly familiar to AC/DC fans – Angus Young regularly employs this type of bend in homage to Chuck's style. You could view this as B♭ minor pentatonic, with a brief shift to the major at the end by playing the seventh fret on the G (the major third).



REPEATED MOTIFS

If an idea worked, Chuck didn't shy away from reusing it. This motif is based loosely on the sliding doublestop lick in the example above, and uses the same phrase in two different lengths. This is predominantly B♭ minor but that major third is present in each repeat.



Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. He has taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the Musicteacher.com platform. He has more than 10 years' experience working in the industry as a touring musician, session guitarist and teacher. To find out more, visit musicteacher.com or follow @leighfugeguitar on Instagram

CHORD CLINIC

E MAJOR

WORDS ROD FOGG

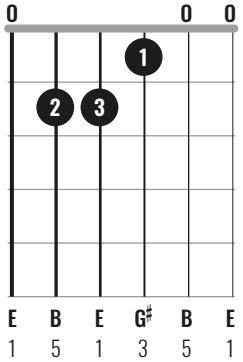
This month, we're looking at the E major chord and teasing out some variations to help shake up your chord sequences

E major is one of the easiest chords to play on the guitar and, as the lowest pitched major chord in standard tuning, it carries some considerable heft. The fingering is the same as A minor (which we looked at last month) but the fingers all move one string up, towards the bass side. Keep your index finger pointing straight at the guitar so that it doesn't accidentally mute the open B string.

E is a great key for rock songwriting, though the downside is that most of the chords in the key will require a barre. Only the IV chord, A major, is available as an open-string chord. Though that hasn't stopped artists as diverse as Fleetwood Mac (*Don't Stop*) and Pixies (*Where Is My Mind?*) from writing hit songs in this key.

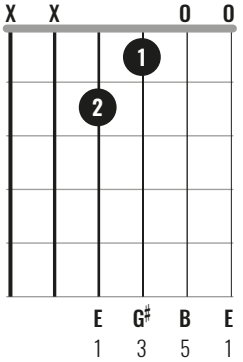
The notes of E major are E, G♯ and B. There are many ways to play E on the guitar, and the basic chord can be adapted easily to include sevenths, sixths, added nine and sus4 variations. Have fun working on these chords – we'll see you next month.

E



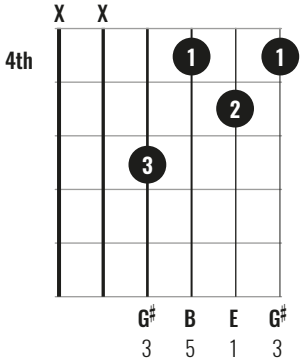
Play the basic chord and hammer-on with finger one – it's a commonly used blues trick. Then hammer-on with any of the other fingers too, or even all three at once. Also try using your thumb to play the low E in a steady beat and your fingers to play the top three strings in a cross rhythm.

E



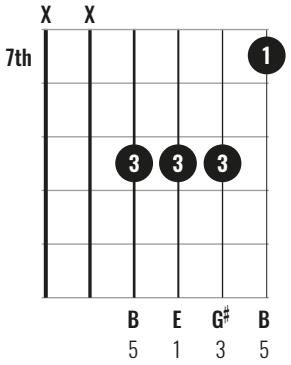
E is an interesting key but you might not always want that heavy open E string. Four-string chords are lighter in texture, easier to play and can be moved around more quickly. We like them a lot. This one is in root position.

E/G♯



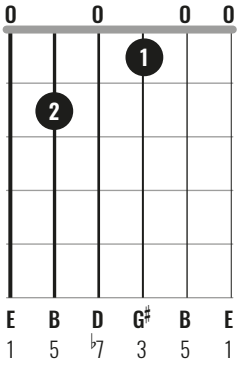
Staying with four-string chords, we've moved up the neck to the fourth fret to make an E major chord with G♯ in the bass. We would call this a first inversion, because the third of the chord is in the bass.

E/B



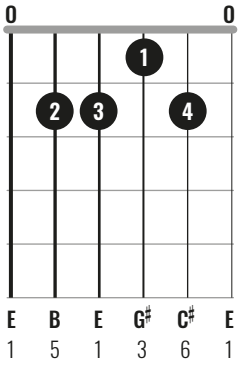
Up at the seventh fret, we get E with B in the bass, which is a second inversion, because the fifth of the chord is in the bass. If you are ever stuck playing an E chord for a long time, try moving between these different inversions to create a more interesting guitar part.

E7



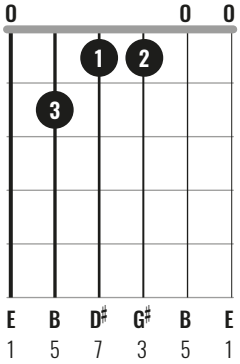
Returning to the basic shape, if you release finger three, you introduce the open D string into the chord, creating an E7 chord. This is a dominant chord, chord V7 in either A or A minor. Try switching back and forth between these chords to hear the effect of chord V resolving to chord I.

E6



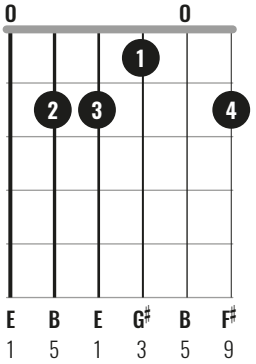
The sixth, C♯, doesn't fit so well under the fingers in the low octave, so we've moved it up an octave to the B string. Try strumming while you add and release finger four so that you alternate between E and E6. Can you play E with the low C♯ instead? It'll be on the A string.

Emaj7



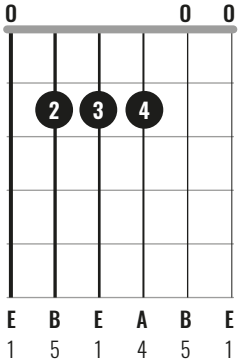
We like the sound of interesting notes added to a chord in the lower octave, as they seem more mellow. Here, we've added D♯, making an E major seven chord. Try E followed by Emaj7 and E7 and then move to A major – or another chord. See what works for you!

Eadd9



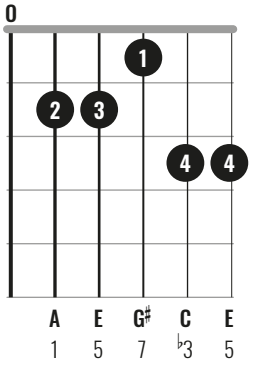
Added ninths sound superb alternating with the plain major chord, giving you another way of creating interest with a strumming E major. Eadd9 just adds the note F♯ but E9 would include the seventh as well. Try it out, using E7 as your starting point.

Esus4



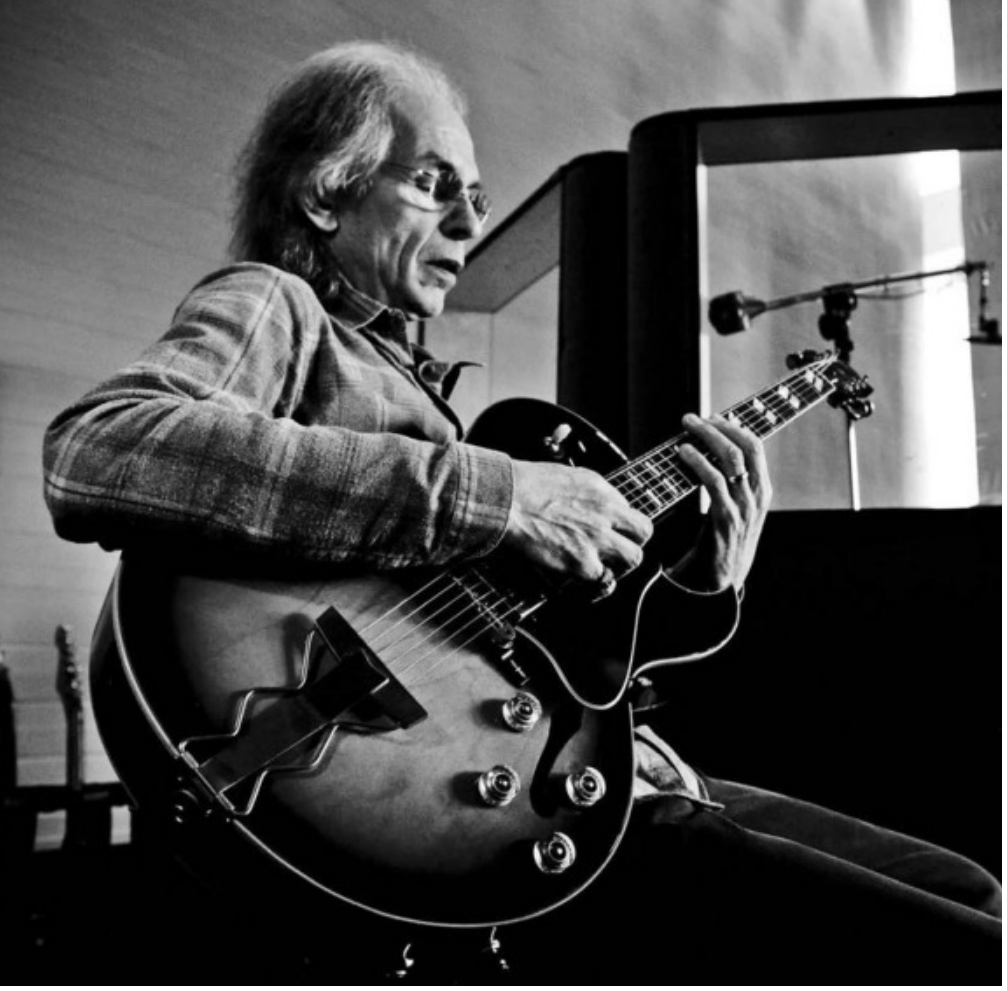
Sus chords (short for suspended) replace the third of the chord with either the fourth or the second, so here we have the note A (the fourth) added to make Esus4. This also works well alternating with the E chord. Esus2 is a tricky one and doesn't fit under the fingers so easily.

E7♯9



Here, we've added the seventh (D) in the upper octave together with the sharp nine which could be called F double-sharp but we've called it G. It's a chord that has both the major and minor third, and it's a powerful beast when you add some crunch. It's not easy – you have to stop two strings with your fourth finger – but it's worth it. Rock on!

Rod Fogg is a London-based guitarist, teacher and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point 2014), *The Electric Guitar Handbook* (Backbeat, 2009) and contributed to bestseller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). Find out more at rodfogg.com



TALKBOX

STEVE HOWE

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

To mark the new Yes album *The Quest*, the prog pioneer talks to us about Charlie Christian, signature models and motorbikes in hotels

The moment it all started...

"I was about 10 and I had a lot of records with the great Les Paul on them. On my parents record collection I kept hearing these guitars and spectacular guitar parts. Then there was the big beat boom, instrumental jazz and The Ventures, everybody like that. I was caught up in the whole drive for guitar and I was whisked away on it."

I couldn't live without my...

"In 1964, when I was 17, I was lucky enough to persuade my dad to put a deposit down on a guitar. I paid the stall man for two years. It was a Gibson ES-175D and it's my pride and joy. It's very much with me and I don't go out the country with it anymore because that's a hassle. So it has a duplicate guitar that gets shipped, a '64 ES-175D. They're the guitars I love most and the guitars I think the most beautiful."

The one that got away...

"You have to resign yourself to these possessions: some will get broken, some will get lost and some will get stolen. Somebody broke into my house and stole a load of guitars. Fortunately, though, they left a Telecaster in the hall! I also sold a Gibson Les Paul TV model in cream. Why I sold that I don't know."

My signature model...

"I designed one with Gibson that was basically a cross between a 175 and a Switchmaster. It had three pickups. Unfortunately, the one they made me first got stolen at Detroit airport, and the one I replaced it with never lived up to my expectations. I only have a few handmade guitars, made by Theo Scharpach. It's a beautiful guitar and I still play it today. But I'd say instead of designing it yourself, just keep looking for a guitar that really suits you."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"I'm a fanatical tuner. When I'm recording, I have to tune with every take! I suppose the first thing I play is probably an E chord and then a chord sequence. With Covid and not touring, I suddenly thought, 'Oh my God, I'm just not going to need to play so much'. Because I'm a multi-guitarist. I've got to be good on a steel, electric and Spanish, so I do things where I'm only playing one guitar because it really gets me on top of my playing."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"Don't start! I guess it's about letting the music design where you go. In other words, I don't think anybody really has the capacity to control everything about their musical output. Music's kind of leading you. Never forget that what you do, how you approach it, will be indicative to where you go."

My Spinal Tap moment...

"There was a sound engineer called Eddie, and when we took him out of the studio, he liked touring more than we did. We were used to touring, this guy was not. One time, he pushed a motorbike into a hotel lobby. The guy said, 'Hang on a second, where are you going with that?' And he said, 'I'm just taking it up to my room, I'm gonna fix it'. And he did! Another time, at the end of a tour in Columbus, South Carolina, he invited the whole audience back to the hotel opposite the gig. The hotel manager was going crazy!"

My guilty pleasure...

"On [1996 album] *Homebrew*, there's one tune called *Strange Wayfarer*. What I say in my notes about it is that one of the things I was wanting to be part of is comedy, you know, because I quite like annoying tunes. And that's so annoying. There's a silliness that's not been exploited that I'm ready for."

I wish I was there...

"To have seen Charlie Christian playing with Benny Goodman, that would have been something. Some guitarists are very good, you can look at their career and you can understand it and you can rave about it. But Charlie Christian's very difficult. When he was with Benny Goodman, there was order and his guitar on those records is amazing."

If I could just play one thing...

"There was a time when I was really aching to be able to read music. I wanted to be able to play great guitar pieces. I even asked John Williams, the classical guitarist, and he said, 'You've got to be able to read the dots'. I thrive on not only using ideas to connect me to music but also this freedom that I've allowed myself. It would have been nice to play some of the great guitar music of John Williams, Flavio Sala, all these great players with a repertoire that I'm in love with." **G**

The Quest is out now on Inside Out/Sony Music

© Annalisa Russo

THE BEST GETS BETTER: FLYBY ULTRA BACKPACK

Upgraded from the inside out with new materials and added gear protection, the FlyBy Ultra is the ultimate sidekick for creators wherever they go.

MONOCREATORS.COM/FLYBY-ULTRA

mono®

SILVERLINE

SERIES

DUAL PATENT DESIGN

CELESTION V TYPE

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

BLOWING THE MINDS OF GUITARISTS EVERYWHERE.

"The Silverline has become my go to amp.
I can get the sound that represents exactly what I'm going for instantly."

PHIL COLLEN
Def Leppard

KT88 6L6 KT66 EL34 6V6 EL84

TRUE VALVE POWER
RESPONSE TECHNOLOGY

ADI SHARC®

CLASS LEADING
SHARC® PROCESSOR

ARCHITECT

FREE DEEP EDITING
SOFTWARE

Designed & Engineered
by Blackstar Amplification UK

Blackstar®
AMPLIFICATION

the sound in your head

Find your nearest dealer at
www.blackstaramps.com